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The Thracians

700 BC – AD 46



Christopher Webber • Illustrated by Angus McBride



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THE THRACIANS 700 BC – AD 46

HISTORICAL OUTLINE

THE THRACIANS were an Indo-European people who occupied the area between northern Greece, southern Russia, and north-western Turkey. They shared the same language and culture, although the former had no written form. To a large extent they preserved the way of life of a tribal Homeric society. There may have been as many as a million Thracians, divided among up to 40 tribes. Ancient writers were hard put to it to decide which of the Thracian tribes was the most valiant: the plains tribes – Getai, Moesi, and Odrysai; or the mountain tribes – Thyni, Odomanti, Dii, Bessi, Bisaltai, and Saurai. Other Thracian tribes included the Triballi and, possibly, the Paionians, although the latter are usually referred to separately from the Thracians.

Herodotus described the Thracians as the most numerous people of all, after the Indians. He said that they would be the most powerful of all nations if they did not enjoy fighting each other so much. They lived almost entirely in villages; the city of Seuthopolis seems to be the only significant town in Thrace which was not built by the Greeks (although the Thracians did build fortified refuges). Thrace had the potential to field huge numbers of troops, and the Greeks and Romans lived in fear of a dark Thracian cloud descending from the north, devastating their civilisation in the Balkans.

Herodotus (II, 167) says that Thracians honoured warriors very highly, and despised all other occupations. Thracian warriors were ferocious opponents who were in high demand as mercenaries. However, they were infamous for their love of plunder. Alexander encouraged his Thracian mercenaries before the battle of Issos by saying that all the purple and gold the Persians were wearing was simply plunder ready to be taken.

Perhaps the prospect of getting to the spoils explains Thucydides VII, 29: 'For the Thracian race, like all the most bloodthirsty barbarians, are always particularly bloodthirsty when everything is going their own way.' There are also several recorded instances of Thracian mercenaries switching sides if offered a bribe, or because they preferred to fight for the other side. Because of their savagery, mercenary Thracians were often used to carry out executions or massacres.

The Thracians were an extravagant, drunken, high-spirited people who loved singing war songs and dancing. Indeed, their battle-hymn seems to have been quite impressive, as Strabo (*Geography* 7 140) says the Greeks had a special name for it,

Attic red figure column krater, c.440 BC: Orpheus and four javelin-armed Thracians. Note the variations of cap details and cloak patterns. (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, VI 3172)



calling it the 'titauismos', in imitation of the cry to the Titans. After surviving invasions by the Persians, Greeks, Macedonians, and Celts, the Thracians were finally conquered by Rome in AD 46. (All dates given in this text are BC unless otherwise specified.)

* * *

The Thracians migrated to south-eastern Europe in the 7th millennium. After the 12th century they also settled in Asia Minor, especially in Bithynia and the Troad, with the Brygi becoming ancestors of the Phrygians. Although the Phrygians lost much of their ancestral roots, the Bithynians retained their Thracian culture. This was the time of the legendary Thracian priest-kings Orpheus, Rhesus, Lycurgus, Tereus, and Zalmoxis; and of the alliance with Troy. The defeat of Troy did not stop Thrace from becoming a significant maritime power in the Aegean for the final century of the millennium.

Thracian tribes inhabited central Macedonia until the founding of the kingdom of Macedonia by the Temenids (early 7th century), at which time they were forced to move eastwards. In the end, the Thracian tribes were restricted mainly to the north-eastern area of the Balkans. From the 7th century many Greek colonies were founded on Thracian shores, leading to intense conflict and mutual influence between the Greeks and Thracians throughout the historical period. Thousands of Greek lives were lost in early attempts to colonise the Thracian shoreline. Between the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars, the Athenians lost nine expeditions while trying to colonise the Strymon valley area alone.

In the first decade of the 6th century, the Persians invaded Thrace and made it part of the satrapy of Skudra. Thracians were forced to join the invasions of Skythia and Greece. A king of the Bisaltai put out the eyes of his six sons because they were so eager to fight that they joined Xerxes' army, even though their father had fled from Xerxes rather than submit to the Persians. This demonstrates how much the Thracians loved their freedom, how savage they were, and how eager they were to fight. The Bisaltai are also known as a source of Macedonian mercenaries, a Macedonian refuge, or as a place for Athenian colonisation. Right up to the Roman conquest they retained their martial qualities – Livy (XLV, 30) calls them 'first class fighting men' when describing the Roman partition of Macedonia.



5th century BC red figure *pelike* from Sozopol: Classical Thracian peltast with flapped cap and boots, colourful cloak, crescent-shaped shield (note inside detail) and two javelins.

Thracian warriors were large, powerfully built men, mostly red- or light-haired and bearded, with grey or blue eyes. They had delicate white skin, and a tendency to put on flesh. Their hair was worn long or short, and straight, and sometimes dressed in a kind of top-knot – probably a sign of noble or warrior status, at least among the northern Thracians, who may have dyed their hair blue. From the 4th century onwards long or curly hair became more common, especially among the northern tribes. The cheeks were shaved, apart from short side-whiskers.

The 5th century BC

According to Herodotus, the Bithynian Thracians also had to contribute a supposedly 60,000-strong contingent to Xerxes' invasion of Greece in 480 (6,000 would be a more likely figure). However, Persian control was rather loose, and many Thracians resisted the Persian occupation during the next decade, even stealing the Persian sacred chariot and its horses. As a result, only a few Thracians fought on the side of the Persians at Plataea in 479. After Plataea the Thracians wounded the Persian commander (Mardonius), and annihilated parts of the Persian army as they retreated through Thrace.

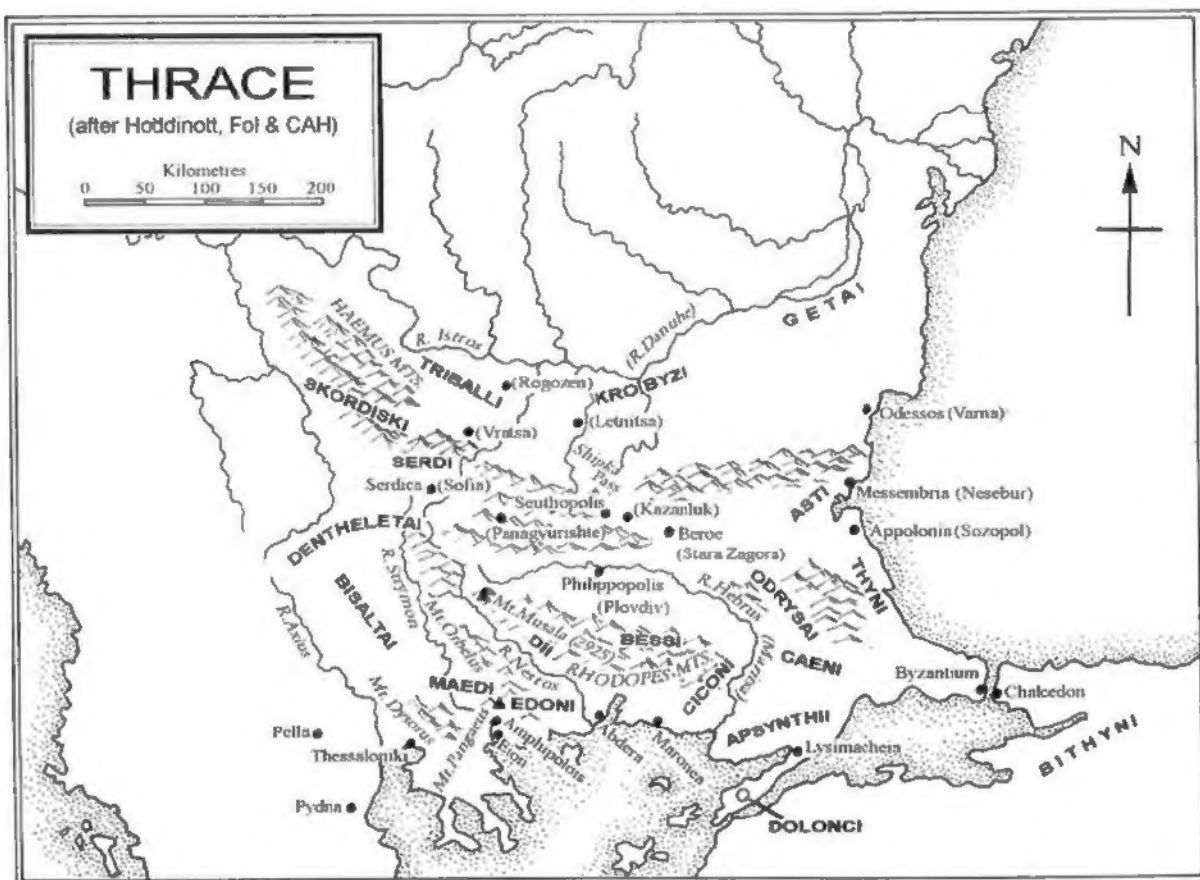


TITLE PAGE Part of a 5th–6th century BC gilt silver belt from Lovech, Stara Zagora district: a royal boar hunt by heavy cavalry and archers. The mounted warriors appear to wear leather armour with *pteryges*.

In about 460 the first **Odryian kingdom** was founded by Teres I in south-eastern Thrace, in territory vacated by Persians. The Odrysai was the most powerful Thracian tribe, the only one to briefly unite almost all the others (including some of the Paionians). Most Thracian kings mentioned in ancient texts were Odrysian kings. Odrysian power was based in the central Thracian plain, where they would later build the only Thracian city – their capital. Seuthopolis, which was built on a Greek plan in the 3rd century, near the modern town of Kazanluk. (It was probably destroyed during the Celtic invasions of 279, and is now submerged beneath a dam.) They left 30 marvellous mound tombs nearby, in an area now referred to as the Valley of the Kings. The most spectacular includes glorious life-like paintings of Thracian cavalry and infantry.

In around 445, Teres was succeeded by his son, Sitalkes the Great. Sitalkes nearly fought a battle next to the Danube with his cousin the Skythian king Oktamasades, but instead signed a peace treaty with him (and attacked the Skythians in 429 instead). The Istros (Danube) river became the northern border of his kingdom, which he extended from the Strymon river on the Aegean to the Black Sea. It had an annual income of 800 talents (half in coin, half in kind), which was only slightly less than that of the Athenian Empire. After his death the kingdom was divided up amongst Sitalkes' brothers and their sons, who set up their own courts.

During the Peloponnesian War, Thrace was an ally of Athens. The Thracians fought alongside both Macedonians and Athenians in some





Silver-gilt appliqué horse decoration from Letnitsa, mid-4th century BC: 5cm. The northern Thracian hero, whose royal status is indicated by the bow behind his back, wears his hair in a top-knot, and scale armour covering at least the upper part of the body. (Lovech Museum, No.585)



Another scale-armoured northern Thracian rider on a plaque from Letnitsa, c.350 BC; the severed head motif is intriguing. (Lovech Museum, No.588)

encounters. The Spartans attempted to persuade the Odrysian king to change sides, but they failed, and Spartan ambassadors on their way to Persia were murdered in Thrace. In autumn 429, Sitalkes, acting in response to an Athenian request, called up all Thracian troops south of the Danube. Some 150,000 warriors poured 'like a cloud of locusts' into Macedonia, carrying all before them (Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, 145). Amyntas, the nephew of the Macedonian king Perdiccas, was travelling with the army, and Sitalkes proposed to install him as the new king of Macedonia. Alarm spread throughout Greece. The peoples of central and northern Greece prepared for war; terrified Athenian enemies further south discussed what to do in the face of a combined Athenian/Thracian army.

However, Sitalkes had reached the Chalkidian peninsula to find that no Athenian army or fleet awaited him. Apparently the Athenians, judging Sitalkes a rather fickle ally, had not expected him to fulfil his promise to attack the Chalkidian cities. Without the Athenians, Sitalkes was unable to take these; but he forced the inhabitants to retire behind their fortifications while he ravaged their lands for eight days. At the same time, since his army was running short of food and suffering from cold, he opened negotiations with Perdiccas. Perdiccas bribed Sitalkes' nephew and second-in-command, Seuthes, to advise a retreat. Sitalkes took Seuthes' advice, and after only 30 days the campaign ended. Sitalkes died in 424 during a war against the Triballi. His enormous

temple/tomb was found in 2000 near Starosel, 100 miles east of Sofia. Seuthes had married Perdiccas' daughter, and succeeded Sitalkes as Seuthes I; but although he raised the empire to its greatest height he was unable to keep it intact.

The Triballi were independent of the great Odrysian Empire and were not included in Sitalkes' army. They were a byword for savagery, and an Athenian club for lawless youths was named after them. They are said to have thought it honourable for a man to sacrifice his own father. They were so unruly and bellicose that the early Roman provincial administrators had to settle them separately from one another. Their territory extended to what is now north-western Bulgaria. The Triballi were in constant contact with the Getai and Skythians, and frequently used Skythian equipment. During one clash the Skythians ordered their farmers and horse-keepers to wait until battle had been joined, then to appear in the distance driving herds of horses. The Triballi took this to be a reinforcement, and fled. At some time after 424 they were overcome by the Autariatae, an Illyrian tribe, and lost the Triballian Plain. They later also came under heavy pressure from the Celts, and tribes from across the Danube. They may have used Celtic weapons. This mixture of Illyrian, Skythian, and finally Celtic influences may be why they are sometimes referred to as distinct from the Thracians.

Thracians continued to be important in the affairs of both Spartans and Athenians. In 423 the Athenians set out to attack Mende and Scione in the Chalkidian peninsula with 1,000 Thracian mercenaries, and some 'pelasts' (javelin-armed light infantry) from their allies in the area – about half the total force. In 422 Thracians formed a large part of Brasidas' army that defeated Cleon at Amphipolis, leading to the

Peace of Nicias. Thucydides tells of Brasidas calling to his standard 1,500 Thracian mercenaries and 'all the Edonian horse and peltasts'. To meet these, Cleon asked Polles, king of the **Odomantians**, to bring as many Thracian mercenaries as possible. In Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, 170, the Odomanti are described as expensive mercenaries and 'the nastiest tribe in Thrace'.

Later, in 413, about 1,300 **Dii** peltasts arrived in Athens too late to sail with the main Athenian force headed for Sicily; they were sent home, as they were too expensive to pay. On their way home through Boeotia they were used first against Tanagra in a quick raid, and then against Mycalessos. Here they were responsible for one of the worst atrocities of the Peloponnesian War, killing every living thing including the children and even the dogs. When the Theban cavalry attacked them they successfully defended themselves, 'dashing out and closing their ranks according to the tactics of their country' (Thucydides, 7.27). In Thucydides (2.98) we find his claim that the Dii were the most warlike infantry in Sitalkes' army. They were independent of the Odrysian Thracian king, but served him as mercenaries and volunteers. They lived in the Rhodope Mountains north of Abdera.

Athens encouraged rival Odrysian princes to fight one another so that the Athenians could retain control of the coastal cities. In 407/406 the kingdom of the Odrysians appears to have been divided between the king Medokos (or Amatokos, 405–391) and his relative Seuthes II (405–384), who asserted his independence. On behalf of Athens, Alcibiades concluded an alliance with both of them for military assistance against the Spartans. He used them to attack cities in the Hellespont, and offered to bring 'great numbers' of Thracian cavalry and peltasts to assist the Athenian fleet at Aegospotami in 405 (the Athenian generals rejected the offer, and thus lost their fleet).

Thracian tribes destroyed many Greek colonies or forced them to pay tribute. Alcibiades was one of many who gained popularity by building or rebuilding a wall across the Gallipoli peninsula to keep marauding Thracians from threatening the Greek cities of the Hellespont. He amassed a great fortune by plundering the tribes which did not acknowledge either Thracian king. It seems that this had no permanent effect, as a war against the Thracians of the Dardanelles was one of the excuses Cyrus the Younger used to gather a mercenary army for his revolt against Artaxerxes II, the Persian king.

In 401, Clearchus defeated the Thracians in a pitched battle, and from then on plundered and ravaged their lands until Cyrus needed his army. Nevertheless, Xenophon records 40 Thracian cavalry and 800 peltasts accompanying the 'Ten Thousand' Greeks in the army of Cyrus at the

Reconstruction of a 5th century BC southern Thracian chieftain, with Corinthian helmet, body armour (see also page 34), two javelins, long laced boots with hanging flaps, and patterned cloak. (© Daniella Carlsson 2001)





Reconstruction of the battle scene on the western side frieze from the entrance corridor (dromos) of the late 4th–early 3rd century Kazanluk tomb. The scenes apparently depict events in the wars of the Odrysian King Seuthes III with Lysimachos. Two lightly armed warriors engage in single combat in the centre of the frieze, while the others await the outcome. Foot soldiers and horsemen marching in converging files follow them. Many of the figures are badly damaged, and their appearance is conjectural. The soldiers in both friezes are lightly armed and have almost the same weapons – long spears, curved swords (some possibly *rhomphaias*) and oval shields. (© Johnny Shumate 2001)

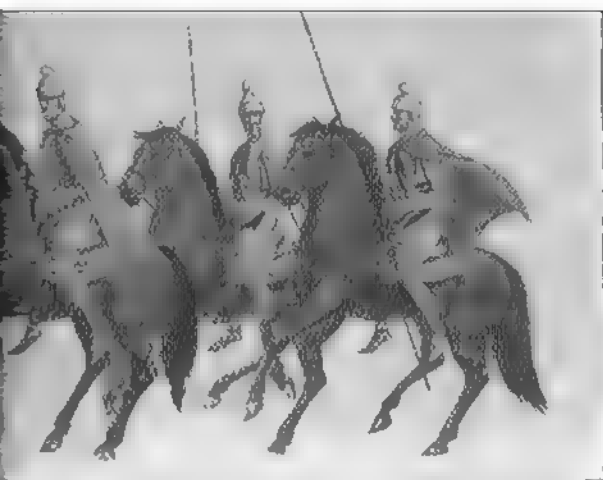
battle of Canaxa. Following Cyrus' death some of the Thracians switched sides, but the rest remained with the "Ten Thousand" on the march home. When they got there, only 24 years after Sitalkes' death, Xenophon would find that Medokos (based at Perperikon, twelve days' journey inland from the sea) called himself the King of Thrace.

However, Medokos was unable to stop Seuthes II from hiring the 6,000 or so survivors of Xenophon's army to win his own domain on the Black Sea coast. This was the largest body of mercenary troops who fought for the Thracians. They were mainly hoplites, but included nearly 1,000 peltasts, javelinmen and slingers, and 50 cavalry. Xenophon says simply that Seuthes had an army larger than the Greek army; and that it grew as the news of its success spread. This could mean that Seuthes' army grew to a strength of around 20,000 men, including the Greeks. Such an army could have had, in addition to the Greeks, around 4,000 light and 500 heavy cavalry, 500 archers and slingers, 8,000 peltasts, and 2,000 javelin-armed fighter infantry. The Greeks left Seuthes' employ after only a few months' service, and those that did not go home crossed to Asia under the Spartan general Dercylidas in 399–398 to fight the Bithynians.

The 4th century BC

The Bithynian Thracians were nominally part of the Persian Empire, but had been independent since around 485, and by this stage they were giving their satrap, Pharnabazus, a lot of trouble. Seuthes sent about 200 horsemen and 300 peltasts to help fight the Bithynians. These men received about 200 hoplites to guard their camp while they went and grabbed their share of the plunder. The Bithynians responded with a dawn attack by cavalry and peltasts on the Odrysian camp. They hurled their spears and javelins at the Greeks, who, shut up inside the stockade, found themselves unable to reply. The Greeks broke down the fortifications and charged out, but were unable to catch the Bithynians. The latter fled from the charge, but kept hurling javelins from both flanks; every charge merely caused more Greek deaths. It was said that only 15 hoplites escaped from this massacre.

Despite the rise of Macedonia, the period 400–280 represented a sort of Thracian golden age, when the Triballi and Getai formed kingdoms



in northern Thrace, and Thracian art flourished. Splendid gold and silver vessels, ornaments, pectorals, helmets, and horse-trappings were produced; such finds still make a strong impression today, with their elaborate workmanship and imaginative designs.

The attack on Bithynia was part of the Spartan war on Persia, led by their king Agesilaus. In 394 Agesilaus returned home, marching through Thrace. The Trallians demanded 100 talents of silver and 100 women to allow his army to pass. He merely asked why they were not ready to receive them, and slew great numbers of them in a pitched battle.

The wily Athenian general Iphicrates fought against Agesilaus, but became unemployed when Athens concluded a peace, and went to work in Thrace. He restored Seuthes to his throne in 389, but the king died soon afterwards. Iphicrates then fought for Kotys I (383–359) against Athens for domination of Aegean Thrace (and, unsurprisingly, was exiled).

Kotys I managed to recombine the Odrysian kingdom, and grew so powerful that he even claimed to be Apollo's son. Iphicrates married his daughter in a great ceremony in Kabyle, and was given two coastal cities as part of his reward. Iphicrates had 8,000 men in Thrace at one stage, but we cannot be sure if this was when he was in Kotys' service or when he was campaigning in the same area on Athens' behalf. Many of Iphicrates' victories were gained using peltasts as the main arm; but what Kotys needed was hoplite heavy infantry, and these probably formed the mainstay of his mercenary force. Other Greek generals also fought for the Thracian kings, but we are not told the size of the forces involved.

Meanwhile, in 376 more than 30,000 Triballi laid siege to the Greek colony of Abdera, possibly by agreement with Kotys. The Abderites sallied forth and slew more than 2,000 of them as they returned home laden with booty. However, the Triballi rallied, the Abderites drew up their lines opposite the barbarians, and a stubborn battle took place. The usual Thracian inhabitants of the region (Edonians, Bistonians, Ciconians, or Sapaean) at first aided the Abderites, but then suddenly changed sides, and the Abderites were butchered almost to a man. The Triballi were about to attack the town when the Athenian general Chabrias suddenly appeared with troops, and drove them away.

Philip and Alexander of Macedon

In 359 Philip II succeeded to the Macedonian throne. He met Kotys, and bribed him to stop his joint invasion of Macedonia with the Illyrians. This proved to be a short-sighted move for Kotys, who was assassinated the same year as a result of an Athenian conspiracy. The Thracian kingdom was divided between his sons – Kersebleptes, Amadokos and Berisades. Iphicrates switched sides, and was soon carrying off a great deal of loot from Odrysian territory, pursued by a large cavalry force. Having few horsemen himself, he gave them burning torches and told them to charge the Thracians, at which the Odrysian horses fled.

The war between Athens and the Thracians ended in 357, when Athens allied with the three rulers of Thrace. The next year Athens concluded an alliance against Philip II with Ketrporis, son of Berisades, as well as with the Illyrians and the Paionians. However, Philip defeated the coalition and acquired the strategic gold and silver mines in Mount Pangaeon, which had been exploited until then by the kings of south-western Thrace (mainly the Edonians). The coalition fell apart, and war between Kersobleptes and Athens continued until 353.

Philip II's first Thracian campaign began in 347–346, waged first by his general Antipater and later by himself. When Athens recognised his territorial acquisitions it allowed him to pursue new conquests in the north of the Balkan peninsula. He conquered southern Thrace in 341, founding Philippopolis (Plovdiv), Kabyle (near Vambol) and other cities on top of older Thracian settlements.

In 339 the Triballi defeated and wounded Philip when he tried to cross the Haemus (Balkan) range while returning from a campaign against the Skythians. Polyaeus (468) says that he survived the pursuit because he ordered his rear rank to lower its spears and remain in place, while the rest of his troops retreated.

When Philip died in 336 the Thracian tribes revolted against his son Alexander III (the Great). They again plotted to invade Macedonia in co-operation with the Illyrians, but Alexander forestalled them by quickly marching into Thrace. He defeated the mountain tribes and continued north, catching the Triballi while they were making camp. They took shelter in a wood by the river Langinus. Alexander ordered his archers and slingers to move up and shoot into the woods. The Triballi surged forward to get to grips with the Macedonian archers, whereupon Alexander ordered Macedonian cavalry to attack the Triballi right wing and Greek cavalry to attack the left. The rest of his cavalry attacked in the centre, followed by the main body of his infantry led by Alexander himself. The Triballi held their own while the fighting was at long range, but were ridden down by the cavalry and routed by the phalanx once they came into contact – some 3,000 Triballi were killed. (Arrian also describes an unusual Thracian tactic using wagons – see under Plate 4, page 47.) King Sirmus, the Triballi, and other Thracians took refuge on an island in the Danube. Alexander manned warships with heavy infantry and archers, and attempted to force a landing. However, there were not enough ships and men; in most places the shore was too steep for a landing, and the current was too strong. Alexander accordingly withdrew the ships, and attacked the Getai instead.

The Getai lived between the Haemus range and the Skythians, on both sides of the Istros (Danube). Herodotus (IV, 98) called them 'the bravest and most noble of all the Thracians'. Their god Zalmoxis taught them that they were immortal; death was merely the gateway to an everlasting paradise, so death – especially in battle – held no fears. Diodorus Siculus (XXI, 11–12) said that the Getai 'are barbarous and lead a bestial existence, live in a wintry land deficient in cultivated grains and fruit, normally sit on straw, eat from a wooden table, and drink from cups of horn or wood.' The poet Ovid, exiled to Tomis, agreed with Diodorus, complaining of the cold climate and the austere Getic lifestyle. Valerius Flaccus (V, 95–100) tells a story that the Pharaoh Sesostris waged war on the Getai, but was so terrified by the slaughter of his people that he



Armoured Thracian on the side of a 4th century BC gold helmet from Cotofenesti, Romania. His Skythian-style helmet has the form of a cap, with scales covering the skull and iron strips on the neck- and ear-guards. This was probably the most popular northern Thracian style.

returned to Thebes and the Nile. Though obviously untrue, it still demonstrates a great respect for Getic ferocity. Fortunately for Alexander, they did not live up to their reputation when he met them.

The Getai held the riverbank against Alexander with 4,000 cavalry and 10,000 foot. Alexander gathered together many boats normally used by the local Thracians for plundering and raiding, and crossed at night with about 1,500 cavalry and 4,000 infantrymen. This daring crossing by so many men took the Getai totally by surprise; they were shocked to see the Danube so easily crossed, and unnerved by the sight of the phalanx advancing upon them in a solid mass. The first violent cavalry charge led them to turn and flee to their town; but the town had few defences, so they abandoned it. Taking with them as many women and children as their horses could carry, they continued their flight into the steppes. Alexander plundered the town, razed it to the ground, and made camp. There he received envoys from various tribes in the area, including the Triballi, who soon afterwards sent troops to join his army.

Thracian troops were critical to Alexander's success; they formed about one fifth of his army and took part in almost all his battles. Of the forces that crossed to Asia, Diodoros lists 7,000 Odrysians, Triballi and Illerians plus 1,000 archers and Agrianians (a Paionian tribe) out of a total of 32,000 foot soldiers. There were also 900 Thracian and Paeonian scouts, out of a total of 4,500 cavalry. A further 500 Thracian cavalry joined Alexander's army while it was at Memphis. A body of Odrysian horse (probably heavy cavalry), commanded by an Odrysian prince, was likewise present.

At the battle of the Granicus in 334, Alexander deployed the Thracians on his left flank, but they were not engaged. Thracian cavalry took part in Alexander's rapid march to Miletus, and Thracian javelinmen screened the Macedonian left flank in battle against the Pisidians.

Alexanders' Thracians were again posted on the left wing at the battle of Issos in 333, this time brigaded with Cretan archers. They were on the left wing at Gaugamela (331), when the savage Thracian cavalry and infantry helped beat off a sustained attack by superior numbers of Persian cavalry. However, the Thracian infantry had mixed success defending the baggage against the Indian cavalry. At the battle of the Hydaspes (326) the Thracian light infantry attacked the Indian elephants with '*capides*' (curved swords or *rhomphaeas*). The Agrianians in particular were given many critical missions.

While Alexander was far away, however, Thrace boiled with rebellion. In 331/330 this involved the participation of Memnon, Alexander's *strategus*, and the Odrysian ruler Seuthes III. Memnon was outmanoeuvred by Antipater, but came to terms with him so favourable that in 325 Memnon led 5,000 Thracian cavalry to join Alexander in Asia. In either 331 or 325 Zopyrion, governor of Thrace, and his 30,000-strong army perished in a campaign against the Getai and Skythians. Lysimachos became governor in his place.

The campaigns of Lysimachos

When Alexander died in 323, Lysimachos tried to secure his hold on Thrace by an attack on the army of Seuthes III. Lysimachos, with only 4,000 infantrymen and 2,000 cavalry, suffered severe losses, but claimed victory over a Thracian army of 20,000 infantry and 8,000 cavalry. The



Thracian helmet from Pletena, decorated with silver band appliques, c.400-350; and drawing of side view. (Drawing © Daniella Carlsson 2001)



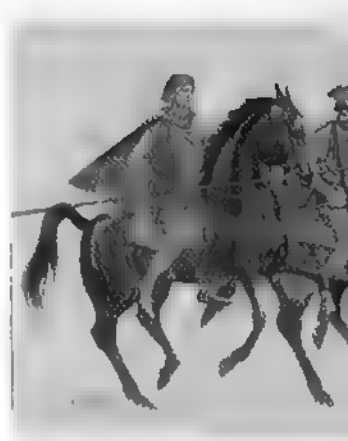
quality of his troops was superior, and after losing many of his own men but killing many times that number of the enemy in a long, stubborn engagement he returned to his camp with a dubious claim to victory. Seuthes III continued to reign parallel with the Macedonian rule established in some of the garrison cities, building Seuthopolis in 320. Nevertheless, Lysimachos had access to large numbers of Thracian troops.

Many other battles in the struggle for Alexander's empire involved Thracian troops. Eumenes deployed Thracians on his left flank at the battle of the Hellespont in 321. At Paraitakene (317), 500 Thracian cavalry fought on one side and 1,000 on the other (possibly colonist Thracians versus native Thracians – the native Thracians won). The Western Pontic Greek cities, Thracians, and Skythians allied against Lysimachos in 313/312, but he quickly marched to meet them and subdued each in turn before they could combine their armies. He terrified the Thracians into changing sides, but on his way home found his unwilling former ally Seuthes III guarding the crossing over the Haemus with many soldiers. Lysimachos lost many of his own men in a battle that lasted a considerable time, but destroyed a vast number of Thracians, and gained the victory.

Shortly afterwards, in 310, Thracians appeared in Skythian service. Diodorus records 2,000 Thracians and 2,000 Greeks serving with Satyrus against the Thateans at the battle of the River Thates. Although Thracians and Greeks were pushed back during the battle, Satyrus' Skythians were finally victorious.

In 308/309 Lysimachos founded his capital, Lysimachia, in the Thracian Chersonesos, and shortly afterwards (306) he declared himself king of Thrace. This title was first contested in 301 at the battle of Ipsos. Lysimachos (with 44,000 foot and 3,000 horse, no doubt many of them Thracian) was allied with Seleukos I and Cassander. Antigonos I perished in the battle, and his possessions in Asia Minor were split between Seleukos and Lysimachos. However, neither was able to gain control of the Thracians in the north-west, and Zibetes was recognised as first king of Bithynia in 294.

Lysimachos attacked the Getic kingdom of Dromichaetes in 293/292, but was captured and released in exchange for territorial concessions. The Getai showed him what tough fellows they were by eating out of wooden bowls, while giving the soft Macedonians gold and silver to eat from, and draped couches to sit on! Lysimachos turned his attention south; in 288 he took half of Macedon and seized Paionia, exiling the Paionian king. He got all of Macedon and the Macedonian throne in 285/286. Unfortunately he also killed his son Agathocles, whose widow eventually caused his death in 281 at the battle of Corupedion against Seleukos.



Reconstruction of peace negotiations between two belligerents in the eastern frieze from the corridor of the Kazanluk tomb. The two commanders in the centre are raising the r swords in salute. The figures on the left are thought to be from a Macedonian army. The colours of the cloaks and tunics at Kazanluk include red, red-brown, pale blue, pale green, cream, off-white and white.
(© Johnny Shumate 2001)

The 3rd and 2nd centuries BC: the Romans look east

In 279 the Celts irrupted into Thrace, burned Seuthopolis, and founded a kingdom of their own with Tyllis as its capital, close to Byzantium. The Thracian aristocracy fled to the Greek colonies on the Black Sea. The Macedonian king, Antigonos Gonatas, defeated the Celts near Lysimachia in 277, but the Thracians did not destroy the Celtic kingdom until 214/213. Despite this, Thracians fought for (and against)



the Seleukid king Antiochos II (261-246) at the siege of Kypsela, and again fought each other at the battle of Raphia in 217. Here, the right-flank Ptolemaic Thracians defeated the left-flank Seleukid Thracians. Raphia was one of the last times the "Successors" could fight each other without Roman interference.

Philip V of Macedon occupied all the cities in Thrace up to the Hellespont, but his success caused Pergamon and Rhodes to induce the Romans to attack him. Philip was unable to use significant numbers of his troops against the Romans because he had to guard his eastern borders against constant incursions by the Maedi. At the battle of Cynocephalae in 197 he had 2,000 Thracians in his battleline. The Thracian peltasts won skirmishes against Roman and allied Greek troops, and helped to push back the Roman left wing. In spite of this, however, Philip's phalanx was shattered, and he lost the battle. From then on Philip was obliged to be a Roman ally.

Antiochos III of Syria was the next to face up to the Romans. Apparently the Romans had loosened Macedonian control on Thrace, for when Antiochos crossed the Dardanelles he had to free the Greeks who were under subjection to the Thracians. The Romans threw him out of Europe, and chased him to Magnesia. Here, in 190, Antiochos broke through the Roman left flank; but instead of exploiting this success decisively he pursued them only as far as their camp, where 2,000 Thracian and Macedonian infantry stopped him from capturing the Roman baggage. This allowed the remainder of the Seleukid army to be wiped out by the successful Roman right wing and centre.

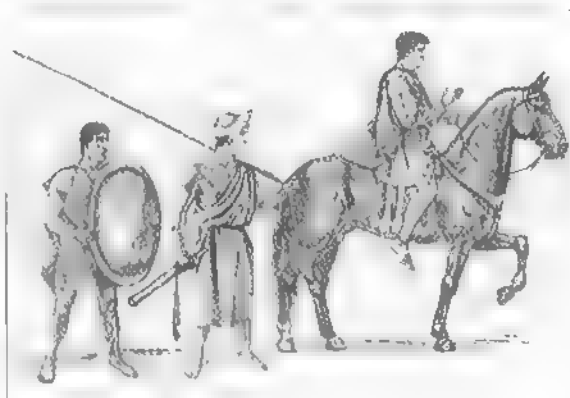
After the battle, 10,000 Thracians drawn from the Asti, Caeni, Maduateni and Coreli occupied each side of a narrow forested pass and waited for the same Roman troops to march along the Hebrus valley in south-eastern Thrace. They waited until the vanguard had passed, then attacked the baggage and, killing the escort, began to loot the wagons. The Roman vanguard and rearguard rushed to help, and fighting began at several points. The battle swayed from one side to the other according to the terrain, the numbers involved, and the courage of the combatants.



The central scene from the Kazanluk eastern frieze, showing two commanders holding the same spear, which is thought to be a peace gesture.

Reconstruction of the procession drawn on the lunette (back wall) of the 3rd century BC Sveshtari tomb; the original is in charcoal, as the tomb was unfinished. It shows a Hellenised king of the Getai being crowned by the Thracian mother goddess. The richly decorated saddle has four long pendants, painted red. The horseman wears a short tunic and *chlamys*; his right hand is outstretched towards the goddess. The two men at left are probably servants. The first, wearing a strange hat which may be a helmet or *pilos*, carries a long spear and a scabbard, from which dangles the baldric. The second, dressed in a knee-length garment, holds a shield.

(© Johnny Shumate 2001)



The booty hampered the Thracians, as most of them left their arms behind so that they could carry away more spoils. The unfavourable ground, on the other hand, made the Romans vulnerable to the barbarians. 'Many fell on both sides and night was already coming on when the Thracians drew off from the fight, not to escape wounds and death, but because they had as much plunder as they wanted' (Livy 38.40).

The Romans marched warily on for a few days. Then, when they had reached more open ground, 15,000 Thracians sought to oppose the Roman ally Muttines the Numidian, who was scouting ahead of the main army with 400 Numidian cavalry and a few elephants. Muttines engaged the Thracians with his elephants in the centre and cavalry on the flanks. His son, with 150 picked troopers, rode through the middle of the Thracians, then attacked their rear, and created such disorder amongst them that they never got near the main body of Roman infantry.

The Bastarnae (either Celts or Germans, and 'the bravest nation on earth' Livy XI, 58) now marched south through Thrace at the request of Philip V of Macedon; but in 179 Philip died and was succeeded by Perseus. The Bastarnae soon came to blows with the Thracians, who were forced to flee up a mountain. The Bastarnae followed them, but were defeated with the help of a thunderstorm. Perseus rebuilt the Macedonian army; and in 171 was joined by Kotys, king of the Odrysai, with 1,000 picked cavalry and about 1,000 infantry.

Perseus already had 3,000 free Thracians under their own commander in his forces; these fought 'like wild beasts who had long been kept caged' (Livy XLII.52) at the Kallinikos skirmish that year, defeating the Roman-allied cavalry. They returned from battle singing, with severed heads as trophies. Their performance at the battle of Pidna (168) was less remarkable – they are only mentioned when running away! Perseus' riverbank guard of 800 Thracians precipitated the engagement after an argument midstream over a baggage animal that had escaped its Roman groom. Thracian infantry also led the Macedonian army out of camp; and 200 Thracian and Cretan archers fought on the Roman side. Perseus lost this battle, and Thrace west of Hebrus was incorporated into Macedonia, which was partitioned. From then on Thracian kings used Roman troops to secure their regimes; they acted only with the approval of Rome, and their children were held hostage there.

The 2nd and 1st centuries BC: Roman pressure grows

Revolt after revolt plagued the Romans for the next two centuries, but these only served to extend Roman power. First there was an initially successful rising against Roman rule in Macedonia in 149/148, led by Andriscus (Pseudo-Philip). The Thracian king Teres lent him a small body of troops and took part in the uprising, but this was soon crushed. In 119 the Scordisci (a mixed Thracian, Illyrian, and Celtic tribe) and Maedi invaded Macedonia, defeating and killing the governor. The Scordisci would be conquered in their turn during 110–107 by M. Manlius Rufus, who took control of the whole Hebrus area and crushed the Bessi.

The worst rising occurred in 91, when Sentius, the Roman governor of Macedonia, was kept busy by several Thracian incursions, one of which reached as far as Dodona. In 77/76 the proconsul of Macedonia, Appius Claudius Pulcher, was killed in a battle with the Maedi. Then, in 61, the Greek coastal cities, supported by the Geta and Bastarnae, revolted against the Romans and defeated them near Isthria. The Romans were again defeated near the Danube in 62/61, when the Macedonian governor G. Antonius Hybrida marched into Thrace. The next year it was Gaius Octavius (father of the Emperor Augustus) who returned the favour, defeating the Bessi when they attacked Macedonia.

This tribe must have impressed the Romans, as they took to calling all Thracians 'Bessi'; they wrote it down as the tribe of origin for all auxiliaries from Thrace. The 'huge Bessi' (Valerius Flaccus II, 229) lived in the mountains north-east of today's Thessaloniki. Herodotus (7.111.1) says that the Satrai (of which the Bessi were a clan) were amongst the best warriors of their day, and remained free of any overlords. Strabo (*Geography* 7.5.12) is more humorous but less complimentary: he recalls that the Bessi 'are called brigands even by the brigands, live in huts and lead a wretched life'.

In 15 or 13 there was an uprising of the Bessi in Thrace, led by the priest in the sanctuary of Dionysus, one Vologaesús. They killed the Thracian king, but the end result was that the border of the Roman Empire was moved to the Upper Danube. This did not stop them from trying again in 11, when L. Calpurnius Piso was called from Pamphylia in Asia Minor to crush another Bessi rebellion. According to Florus (2, 27), after this rebellion had been put down the Thracians 'showed their mad rage even in captivity; for they punished their own savagery by trying to bite through their fetters.' In AD 26 Poppaeus Sabinus put down a revolt of southern mountain Thracians (probably Bessi) with the help of the Thracian king Rhometales II. The Thracians retreated to a mountain fortress where the braver spirits 'capered and chanted in front of their lines according to their national custom' (Tacitus); but despite a brave defence they could not dislodge their besiegers, and some committed suicide rather than be taken prisoner.

A rather different threat to Roman rule in Thrace came from Mithridates VI of Pontus. This ruler of Rome's ever-threatening neighbouring power was very popular among the Thracians; their cities allied with him, and many warriors served in his army. His first war against Rome began in 88, but his involvement in Thrace began in 110-100, when he extended his rule over the northern coast of the Black Sea. His campaign was a disaster for Thrace, however: when he was thrown out of Europe the Romans came back to Thrace not as meddlers in internal politics but seeking retribution and conquest. In 74/71 Lucullus marched along the western Pontic coast; he conquered and plundered Kabyle and the Greek cities even though they had switched sides and were now his allies. Roman rule became more firmly entrenched over a wider area of Thrace, and many of the Greek cities of the area lost their independence permanently. Later, while Lucullus was campaigning in Pontus, he used Thracian cavalry to successfully charge Armenian cataphracts in the flank.



4th century BC northern Thracian silver helmet with gilt decorations. It has a high dome hammered from one sheet of silver, perhaps to accommodate the top-knot worn by noblemen. (Founders Society Purchase, Sarah Bacon Hill Fund; photograph © 2000 The Detroit Institute of Arts)

A very similar 4th century BC silver-gilt helmet from Agighiol, Romania. In all, five of this type have been found at different Romanian sites; they are termed 'parade' helmets, purely on the grounds of their richness, but in fact we cannot know to what extent noblemen displayed their wealth on their battle gear.



Mithridates did not lose his popularity, however. Thracian mercenaries who had served him but were now in the service of Marcus Fabius switched sides when Mithridates made a surprise attack on the Roman army, which only survived because Mithridates himself was wounded. Mithridates VI eventually committed suicide.

Between 73 and 71 there was a major slave revolt in Italy led by Spartacus, a Thracian gladiator. Many of the mountain tribes and peoples north of the Danube remained free and continued to cause Rome trouble. In 57/55 a Thracian/Illyrian army consisting of Maedi, Denthelatai and Dardanians made incursions into Macedonia and reached Thessaloniki. In 29–28 a Bastarnae/Dacian invasion south of the Danube was repelled by the proconsul of Macedonia, M Licinius Crassus (grandson of the Crassus who defeated Spartacus). He conquered the Danube plain all the way to the Haemus mountains.

The 1st century AD

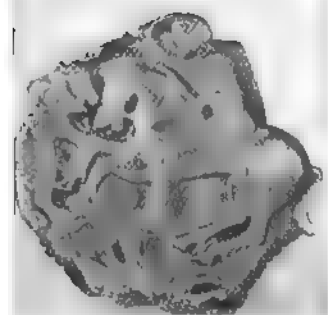
The Thracian kings accelerated the Roman conquest by their own confusing dynastic squabbles; at times there were three Thracian kings ruling at once. For instance, when Rhoemetaces I died in AD 12 the Romans entrusted the Odrysian territories north of the Haemus to Rhaskouporis, and those to the south to Rhoemetaces' son Kotys. War soon broke out, and in AD 19 Kotys was killed by Rhaskouporis. Rhoemetaces II, the son of Rhaskouporis, received the lands to the north of Haemus, while Kotys' children got their father's lands. However, they ruled over them only under the guardianship of the Roman *propraetor*, and in AD 21 Thrace saw another anti-Roman uprising by Odrysians, Dii and Koilaletai. The rebels besieged Rhoemetaces II (AD 19–36) in Philippopolis, but the Romans arrived in time to save him. Rhoemetaces III was less lucky, being killed during a rebellion in AD 44/45. He was the last Thracian king: **in AD 46 the Emperor Claudius annexed Thrace as the province of Thracia**, under a Roman *procurator*, with Perinthos as its capital.

Formal annexation did not stop further raids, incursions, and rebellions, however. The most significant of these came from the Dacians, direct descendants of the Getai who spoke a language closely related to Thracian. Burebista, the first great Dacian king (c.70–44), made the Geto-Dacian state powerful enough to worry Rome. In 53, seeking to expand his domain, he moved south along the western Pontic coast as far as Apollonia Pontica. Marcus Antonius used a rumour that the Getai were raiding Macedonia to get control of an army of six legions, plus numerous auxiliaries stationed there. Antony told the Senate that this army had been prepared by Caesar to be used first against the Getai, then against the Parthians. It was feared that the Getai would make an incursion into



Reconstruction of 3rd–1st century BC Thracian warrior with *rhomphaia*, greaves, Thracian helmet, javelins, and Kyustendil oval shield. (© Daniela Carlsson 2001)





Macedonia if the army were withdrawn; perhaps this explains the Romans' savage treatment of this people. In AD 11/12 they displaced about 50,000 Getai to the right bank of the Danube (Ripa Thraciae). Because of this, a large number of Geto-Dacian towns in the Wallachian plain were uninhabited after the reign of Augustus.

Incursions by Dacians and Sarmatians into Moesia occurred in AD 69 and 87. There followed almost continuous war with the Dacians until AD 106, when Decebalus (AD 87-106) committed suicide and his capital, Sarmizgetusa, fell to the army of the Emperor Trajanus. Thereafter Dacia became a Roman province.

The Roman province of Moesia was created in around AD 15. It incorporated present-day eastern Serbia, northern Bulgaria and south-eastern Romania. It was named after the Moesi, who lived in eastern Thrace, in the plains bordering the sea and the Danube. They were Rome's strongest enemy in Thrace towards the end of the 1st century. Florus (*Moesian War* II, XXVI) says, 'It is a repulsive task to describe the savagery and cruelty of the Moesians and their barbarity surpassing that of all other barbarians.' Before one battle with Marcus Cassius (29 BC) the Moesians sacrificed a horse in front of the army and made a vow that they would offer up and feed upon the vitals of the slaughtered leaders of their enemies.

Imperial troops raised in the province of Thrace fought throughout the Roman world, including Britain. The tombstone of a Thracian cavalryman, Rufus Sura (presumably he had red hair like his ancestors), was found in Gloucester and is now on show in the city museum; and a Thracian shrine has been excavated in Dorset. Another Thracian cavalryman has his tombstone from Wroxeter on display in Shrewsbury's Rowley House museum. At the other end of the empire, in the Crimea, Lucius Furius Senthies left his equestrian tombstone.

There had also been Thracians in the Roman army before they joined the empire. In 48 BC in the campaign of Pharsalus the Odrisian king Kotys sent around 500 cavalry with his son Sadalas to join Pompey's army in Greece. Among Pompey's infantry were members of the Bessi tribe, some of them mercenaries, others conscripted or volunteers. Pompey's camp was 'zealously defended by the Roman cohorts left to guard it, but more fiercely still by the Thracian auxiliaries' (Caesar, *Civil Wars*, 91). Some 2,000 Thracian, Illyrian, Parthian, and Thessalian cavalry were at Philippi in 42 BC, while Thracian mercenaries and allies also participated on the losing side in 31 BC at the battle of Actium, where Octavian (Augustus) defeated Mark Antony. The heavy recruiting requirements of the Roman army are cited as the major reason for a Bessi revolt.

However, despite this movement of Thracians all over the Roman Empire, the Thracian culture and language survived until at least the 3rd century AD, when barbarians began to ravage Thrace. They finally disappeared during the massive Slavic migrations of the late 6th-early 7th centuries AD.

THRACIAN COSTUME

Classical and Archaic periods

From the 7th to the 4th centuries the Thracians wore a tunic, cloak (*zeta*), cap (*aloprekis*) and boots (*embades*). Thracian warriors with this

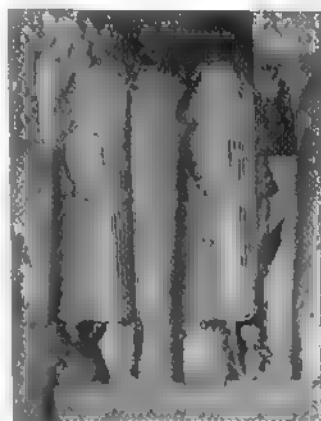
Silver-gilt plaque, c.400-350 BC from Leinitsa, showing a hunting scene; the boar hunt was a significant step in the life of the Thracian warrior. Note the Vratsa-style greave being worn by the Thracian hero in scale armour - see also page 36. (Courtesy of Lovech Museum)

OPPOSITE Front view of a bronze breastplate from a 5th century BC tomb at Eski Saghra, near Stara Zagora. One iron rivet is still attached to the left shoulder and there are remains of rivets round the edges, where bronze patching survives in the middle. These were fastened to a lining, which indicates that it was worn without pteryges, like the earliest Greek versions. These primitive 'bell' types were decorated simply, with the chest muscles ending in three-petaled lotuses, fish tails, or engraved marine monsters somewhat resembling Chinese dragons, and had other anatomical details enhanced by palmettes. (H.354m W.288m Ashmolean Museum No.1948.98)



Detail from Attic red figure kylix, 470–460 BC: a Thracian peltast in traditional costume, and armed here with a long spear. (Courtesy the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Bequest of David M. Robinson)

Tribute-bearers from Skudra, on the *apadana* stairway at Persepolis; Skudra was the Persian satrapy of Thrace in 512–490 BC. Note the ribbed circular shields, pairs of spears, *saka*-style caps similar to the *alopekis*, top-knots, and full length cloaks. (Courtesy Oriental Institute, University of Chicago)



dress are common in 6th–5th century Greek art, and are still described by Xenophon in the early 4th century. This costume was probably in use 50 years later, as it is worn by the Thracian warrior goddess Bendis on an Athenian relief of about 350 – though newer styles had already begun to supplant it.

The exact shades of earlier Thracian costume are unknown, although it is described as brightly coloured. The tomb paintings use rather dull colours, and are not much help prior to 350. Thracian clothing was made of hemp, flax, or wool and was well regarded for its fine quality and texture. Outer garments were sewn, naturally or artificially dyed, with woven or embroidered decoration. The way in which the clothes were worn depended on the season and on the type of work practiced, with certain regional differences. The northern Thracians wore narrow trousers and a short shirt

tucked into them, combined with an outer tunic tied at the waist. Over this clothing, cloaks, fur coats and the characteristic Thracian *zeira* were used. These were decorated with *fibulae*, leather or textile belts, and various other articles of adornment.

There were a wide variety of Thracian caps, in three main styles. *Alopekis* means fox-skin in Greek; and one type was clearly made of a fox's skin, its mask perched above the wearer's forehead, with neck- and cheek flaps of patterned cloth. A second style shows the same neck- and cheek-flaps attached to a low-crowned cap of cloth or felt, or sometimes perhaps dappled cowhide. The third style is a simple high-crowned 'Phrygian' cap, again with neck- and cheek-flaps, all apparently made in one piece.

In some (northern) tribes the wearing of headgear may have been confined to the nobles. The nobles were called *Zibythides* ('cap-wearers') in the Thracian language, because they alone had the right to wear the felt cap (*pileus*). The Dacians had a similar custom – the noble Daci were called *pileati*, and the common Daci *conati*. The commoners of these tribes generally went bareheaded. The northern tribes wore clothing similar to the Skythians, including trousers, long-sleeved shirts, pointed shoes and a jacket with coloured edges. Skudrian tribute-bearers on a Persian tomb wear a Skythian-style hat with a bulge at the back, which could be to accommodate a top-knot. Among the Agathyrsi (a Skythian tribe living near the Thracians, and practising some Thracian customs) the nobles also dyed their hair blue.

There are, however, many paintings of the Thracian tunic and cloak. The tunic was knee-length and sleeveless. It was tied at the waist, and belt buckles with wolf motifs were common. The tunic was frequently patterned like the cloak, but was sometimes unmarked or patterned at the hem only.

The cloak was worn over the top of the tunic and was the most striking article of Thracian dress. The peltasts and cavalry wore it, but

not the lighter infantry. It covered the whole body like a blanket, and seems to have been of heavy material, since the paintings show it as stiff and not hanging in folds. This would suit the mountain tribes, who had to deal with very cold winters and cool nights during the summer. It was very long, often reaching to the feet. The top portion could be folded over as a sort of cape; alternatively the top corners could be turned in to hang over the chest, or thrown back over the shoulders. It was held on by a single fibula or brooch at the left shoulder, and was often worn like a Greek cloak – draped over the left shoulder, leaving the right arm free. The cloak was boldly patterned with lozenges, zig-zag and castellated lines, and other geometric motifs.

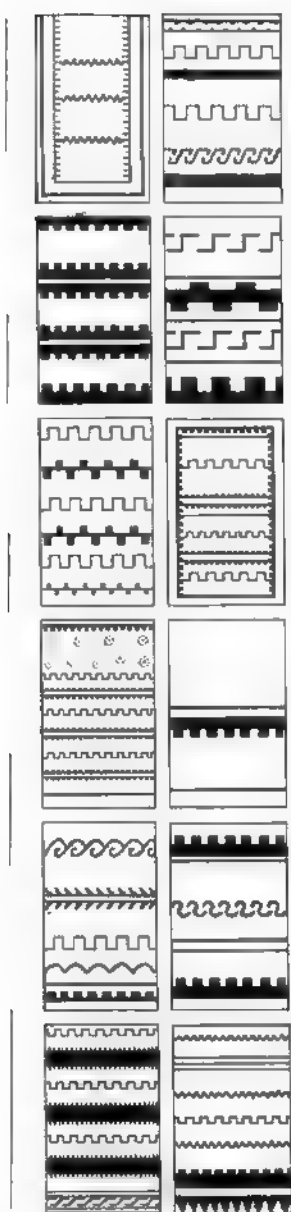
Thracian boots (embades) were another distinctive feature. They were made from lawnskin, and (in contrast to Greek and Roman styles) entirely covered the feet and part of the lower leg. These boots were laced at the front, usually with a number of flaps hanging down from the top. They were ideal for the colder climate of the mountains, or for cavalry use.

Hellenistic and Roman eras

A dramatic change in appearance began during the 4th century, reflecting Greek influence. The evidence comes from wall paintings in tombs near Kazanluk (early 3rd century), Alexandrovo (early 1st century), and Sveshtari (3rd century). These also provide the first colour references. They show that the beards, tattoos, cloaks, boots, hats, and top-knots have all disappeared. At this time also, archaeological evidence proves that some Thracians began to wear (usually three) bronze or gold torcs around their necks. Bare feet, sandals, or yellowish or red-brown shoes with turned-up toes replaced the boots. The Thracians who fought in Alexander's army would have been very similar in appearance to their Macedonian and Greek comrades in arms.

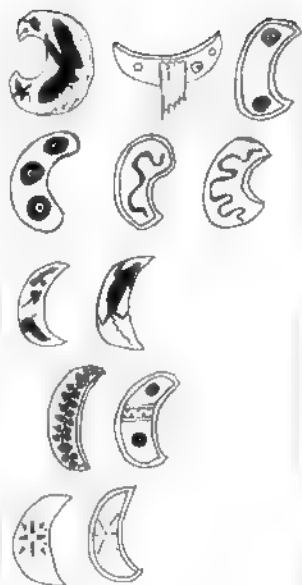
Most tunics at Kazanluk are simple, single-colour garments, either with patterned borders or free of any decoration. Some are short-sleeved and others sleeveless. In the latter case the tunic was probably fastened at the shoulder with pins, as it is occasionally shown leaving the right shoulder and chest bare. At Alexandrovo there is one tunic which is brown with two white vertical stripes down both sides, and another which is the opposite: long-sleeved, and white with red-brown stripes. These are like the tunic of one servant on the dome of the Kazanluk tomb: red-brown with one white stripe on each sleeve and two down each side. One of the riders in the Alexandrovo tomb wears a long-sleeved blue top under his white tunic (which is decorated with a few thin vertical orange lines). The Thracians at the battle of Pydna (168) wore black tunics. Few of the infantry at Kazanluk, and none of the figures at Alexandrovo, wear cloaks.

Thracian heroes and gods carved in stone and metalwork during the early Roman era show that the Thracians took to wearing Roman and Celtic dress. Some also wore trousers. They had curly hair, may have worn torcs, and a tunic or cloak held by a single circular brooch on the right shoulder. The tunic is in some cases vertically folded and pleated many times, and tucked in around the waist; the folds almost conceal a belt which is worn together with a baldric.



9th–4th century BC Thracian cloak designs, from the evidence of Greek pottery. Like the clothes worn by Balkan people until recently, the patterns probably indicated the owner's tribe and region of origin, and groups of warriors from the same area probably wore similar patterns (though this is hard to establish, as few Greek vases show groups of Thracians).

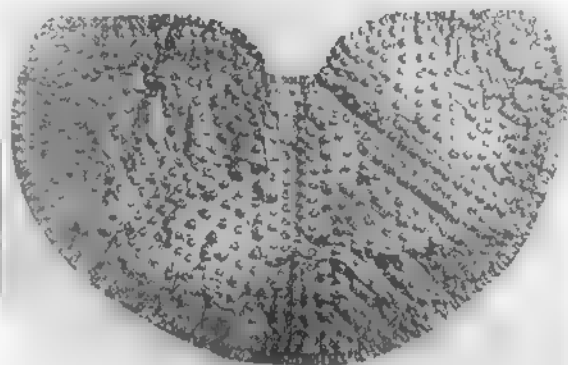
ARMOUR



6th–4th century BC peltast shield designs from Greek art.

Most vase paintings show the peltē decorated with either a simple face, animal figures, or more complex designs quite different to those on hoplite shields.

Gold crescent-shaped pectoral, c.5th century BC, from Eski Saghra, Stara Zagora district. It has three holes for suspension, and is decorated with embossed animal heads and rosettes, etc., in rows. (Ashmolean Museum, No.1948.96)



Armour was initially restricted to the noble cavalry, but in the 4th century many troops began wearing helmets, and peltasts started wearing greaves. There was a marked difference between northern and southern Thrace, with the northern warriors wearing Skythian-style panoplies, and the southern Thracians wearing Greek equipment (with Thracian alterations). Thracian warriors commonly used armour that was older than the rest of their equipment, or a mixture of armour and weapons from different styles and periods. Some types of armour persisted among the Thracians long after they had ceased to be used elsewhere. Assuming that burials reflected actual practice (a large assumption, but one we cannot dismiss), Thracians in this period often wore a mixture of Thracian and Greek equipment, and only one or two pieces of armour, not a complete panoply. Finally, Thracian troops of the Roman client-kingdom were equipped 'in the Roman style' (Florus II, XXVII) – which may have meant that they wore Roman mail shirts and helmets, and carried Roman shields. They continued to use these when they became Thracian auxiliaries in Roman service.

Helmets

The most important Thracian helmet styles were Chalkidian, Corinthian, Thracian, Attic, and Skythian (or Northern). Helmet styles continued in use in Thrace after they had gone out of fashion elsewhere, and it took some time before newer versions were taken up by Thracian troops. Many helmets found in Thrace show signs of repeated wear and tear, with riveted inserts and tenons. Many hybrids and variants also occur: e.g. one Thracio-Bocotian model, from Moldavia, has the skull of the former and the downswept brim of the latter. Helmets were lined with felt or leather, or worn over caps; the remains of a felt cap have been found inside a Thracian helmet from Pletena, and leather remains inside other helmets.

The Chalkidian helmet (in two models) was the most common found in central and southern Thrace. Before 350 the most frequently used form was the simple version, with engraved, stylised eyebrows. An advanced late 5th century version from Rouets has a relatively high crown, longer, sickle-shaped cheekpieces, and long, pronounced eyebrows meeting in a curved V-shape across the front. Two bands of engraved ornament separate the skull from the sides.

After about 350 a new version of the Chalkidian helmet came into use. The new type had two variants, with fixed or hinged cheek-guards. One fabulous example (see page 24) is all bronze except for hinged iron cheek-guards; it looks like an over-excited Hollywood wardrobe department's idea of a barbarian helmet, with tall bronze horns and fittings for a Greek-style horsehair crest. It was found in a 4th century grave at Bryastovers near the Black Sea. These more complicated helmets are likely to have

belonged to the noble cavalry and Thracian leaders, who also wore elaborate Greek parade helmets – a sheet gold composite version was found at Panagyurishte.

After the Macedonian conquest many of the helmets mimicked the Thracian caps, so that these helmets are known as Phrygian (or Thracian) helmets. The 'Thracian' helmet appeared in Greece in the middle of the 5th century; but strangely enough, although more of this type have been found in Thrace than anywhere else, it is rarely found in Thracian burials before the Hellenistic era. They were made mostly from bronze (often in a single piece), but some included iron. Such helmets were often crested and sometimes had extra crests or feathers as side-ornaments. (See, for comparisons, pages 11 and 33.)

In the early 3rd century Kazanluk tomb paintings the Thracian helmet is the commonest, but two warriors wear strange yellow circular flat-topped hats. These may be from an unknown Thracian tribe, but it is more likely that they are Macedonian nobles wearing variants of their distinctive leather cap, the *hausia*. One figure, however, is bare-headed and long-haired, like another earlier figure at Alexandrovo. Other infantrymen in the Kazanluk paintings wear bronze Attic helmets, most with pale blue crests.

By contrast, warriors depicted on northern Thracian (Getic or Tiballi) metalwork are normally bareheaded. One exception is a warrior portrayed on the side of a gold helmet from Cotofenesti, who wears a Skythian-style helmet. More famous, however, are five richly decorated conical gold and silver helmets from different sites in Romania (see page 15). These have eyes and eyebrows embossed and gilded on the forehead, and embossed and gilded animals and human figures around the sides; their high-domed skulls may have allowed space for the wearer's top-knot hairstyle. They have rectangular cheek-guards, a short neck-guard, and cut-outs for the ears and face. It is possible that less ornate items of the same general pattern may have been worn in action. One Illyrian, an Attic, and some Chalkidian helmets have also been found in Getic graves.

Body armour

Body armour is rare in Thracian graves, however, it is also rare in tombs from coastal Macedonia and Chalkidike, where it was clearly in common use by the living. It was limited to Thracian commanders and nobles, such as Seuthes' heavy cavalry bodyguard, until the presumed wider introduction of mail shirts for infantry by the Roman client kingdom. There were two traditions, from northern and southern Thrace. Initially the armour was made of leather and/or bronze, but iron armour started to appear in the 4th century.

Descriptions of Homeric Thracians, and archaeological evidence, show that Greek armour was in use in Thrace long before the Classical period. In the *Iliad*, X, Rhesus had 'marvellous golden armour, of the rarest workmanship'; and his sleeping bodyguard laid their splendid armour



Mounted northern Thracian chief on the side of a 4th century BC silver helmet from Agighiol, Romania.

Early 4th century tomb painting from Alexandrovo, showing a rider wearing a long-sleeved white tunic decorated with red/brown stripes, and a man on foot wearing a short-sleeved red/brown tunic striped with white.



on the ground beside them in three orderly rows. The 'bell' corselet was used in Thrace until the 5th century, when it was obsolete in Greece (see page 16). The most interesting example is a 5th century bronze bell cuirass from Rouets which has an abdominal plate still attached by means of silvered nails to the bottom of the breastplate (see page 34).

Other, non-metallic armour was in use at the same time. It is possible that groups of gilded silver appliques found in 5th century Thracian tombs were originally attached to a leather parade corselet, similar to the later iron corselets from Vergina and Prodromion. These were decorated with sheet gold ornaments (gorgons and lions' masks). Something similar belonging to a composite outfit may have been found at Panagyurishte; there the armour had rusted away, leaving gold strips and studs, as well as six rectangular silver appliques with the head of Apollo, and two low-relief silver discs showing Heracles and the Nemean lion.

Another leather jerkin found near Lovets had a belt to which were attached thongs for a scabbard; this was fixed with a bronze ring decorated with a reclining doe. A late 2nd century coin of Mostis, a Thracian king, shows a smooth corselet with short sleeves, but no other detail is discernible. The mounted warriors on the 5th–6th century Lovech silver-gilt belt apparently wear leather armour with *pteryges*.

Other warriors wore broad iron-scale belts, two of which have been found in Thrace. These belts are like Urartian bronze belts of around 600, used later by the Scythians and in various parts of the Achaemenid Empire, so it may be that Thracian warriors wore something similar. They were originally fixed to some organic substance, either leather or linen. It is not clear whether such a belt would have been worn below the cuirass, or as an alternative to it.

Xenophon records Scuthes' Odrysian cavalry 'wearing their breastplates' in 400 (*Anabasis* 7.3.40). This probably represents an armoured bodyguard rather than suggesting that all Thracian cavalry were armoured. They probably wore the late improved version of the 'bell' type bronze plate cuirass, which was used in Thrace until the middle of the 4th century. The waist band disappeared, replaced by a narrow out-turned flange, and more carefully modelled anatomical relief lines. Instead of an upstanding collar to protect the throat the neck was cut low, leaving the upper chest exposed. This was covered by a crescent-shaped pectoral of silver-plated gilded iron, decorated with bands of relief foliate ornamentation. It had a forward collar, and was held on by a narrow hinged strip fastened round the back of the neck with some form of catchplate.

Such iron-backed collars were worn both in Thrace and Macedon, but seem to have had a longer tradition in Thrace. They were designed to be symbols of rank. There may have been two types of collar, one for parade and one for battle, as a gorget of sheet gold was found with a plain iron collar in a Macedonian tomb at Vergina. Also, two other collars (from the 4th century Mal Tepe tumulus and Vurbitsa) were found without cuirasses. At Gaugamela Alexander wore an iron gorget, quite probably of the same type as these pectorals. A c.350 advanced



Gold helmet from 4th century BC tomb of a Getic prince at Cotofenești in Wallachia. The multiple 'bumps' on its flat top and sides are thought to represent the hairstyle of the wearer.

OPPOSITE Helmets found in Thrace. (1) Bronze 6th c. BC Corinthian from Chelopechene, Sofia district. (2) Bronze 4th c. BC Thracian from Shipka; there are traces of palmetto-like appliques on both sides of the top, and horizontal ornaments in front at the bottom. (3) Chalkidian, from Dolna Koznitsa, Kyustendil district. (4) Helmet from Moldavia combining Thracian and Boeotian features. (5) Bronze 5th c. BC Chalkidian with hinged cheek-guards, Nova Zagora district. (6) Reconstruction of bronze Attic helmet with 5th c. BC bronze cheek-guard from Gurle, Pernik district, bearing relief figure of Hercules brandishing club and bow; he also has a quiver and lionskin. (© Daniela Carlsson 2001)

form of iron pectoral with sheet metal inlay from Katerini was worn over a composite cuirass decorated with gilded silver appliques. This contrasts with a more workmanlike Macedonian gorget of bronze scales on leather which is dated to around the same time. It is not known what armour was worn when the 'bell' style went out of fashion, but a composite iron type with iron collar seems likely, to be replaced later amongst noble commanders by the muscled cuirass.

Northern Thracian armour

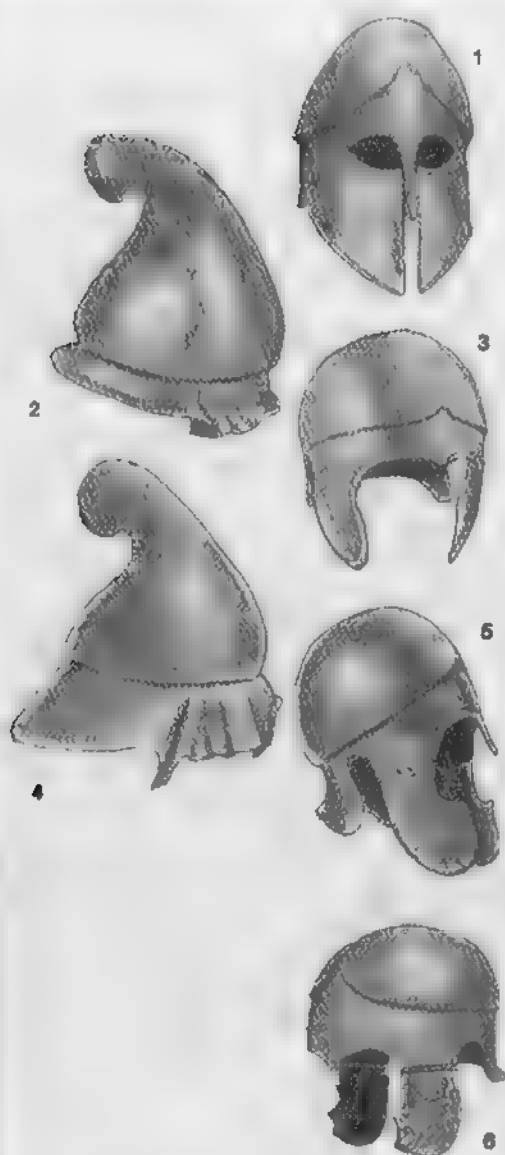
A north Thracian noble would wear long sleeves and trousers, and a bronze or iron scale cuirass, which had scaled pteryges, short sleeves, and a small collar of upright plaques. He would also wear greaves, or Skythian-style scale armour leggings, and a helmet based on a local design. His cloak and tunic would have been marked in the traditional Thracian style. The north Thracians used similar types of armour to the Skythians.

A scale armour corselet from 1st century Beroe has been found, but scale armour is generally rare south of the Balkan range. Several appliques from Letnitsa (in what was Triballian territory) show a mounted warrior wearing a scale armour corselet. This is divided into pteryges below the waist, in Greek style; unlike Greek corselets it lacks shoulder-pieces, and appears to have short sleeves. On other plaques he is covered from shoulders to feet in what looks like mail but is probably scale armour or cloth. Scale armour pieces covering both arms and legs have been found in Skythian tombs, so full body armour may have been worn. The cheekpiece of the Agighiol gilt silver helmet bears a horseman similar to the Letnitsa heroes, except that he has curly hair and a smooth (linen or leather) cuirass.

The other common form of northern Thracian armour was the composite metal cuirass made of iron or bronze scales or strips fastened with bronze rings to a leather backing. This recalls the splinted construction of Skythian arm- and leg-armour. It continued to be worn during the 4th century and after, in conjunction with bronze or other metal armour. On a cuirass found in a Getic grave of c.300 the iron strips were decorated with small bosses within embossed circles, linked by tiny rings, a small silver wire snake also decorated it. This type of armour often included a gilded and highly ornamented iron-backed collar-pectoral.

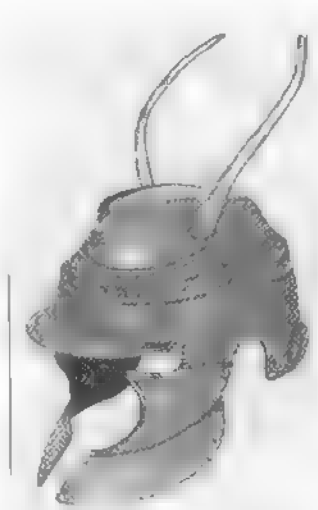
Greaves

Only a few early Thracian cavalry (possibly only the officers) wore greaves. No Thracian infantry wore greaves until the 4th century. One pair was found near Kyustendil with 4th century infantry





4th century BC horned bronze helmet from Bryastovets, Bourgas district. (Sofia Archaeological Museum, Inv.No.3454)



Reconstruction of the Bryastovets helmet; it apparently had hinged iron cheek-guards. (© Daniela Carlsson 2001)

gear, including an oval shield, and probably belonged to a Thracian mercenary or a Macedonian. Greaves later became more popular – Plutarch (*Aemilius Paulus*) tells us that at Pydna in 168, ‘First marched the Thracians, who inspired the most terror; they were of great stature, with white [or bright] and glittering shields [*thurroi*] and black tunics under them, their legs armed with greaves.’

Two types of greave have been found in Thrace: the native and Greek types. Two elaborately decorated silver-gilt Thracian ceremonial greaves have been found, one at Vratsa in Triballian territory, and one at Agighiol on Getic land (see pages 36-37). They show the face of the Thracian mother goddess at the knee. An armoured Thracian horseman wearing the same greaves is on one of the Letnitsa plaques. As these greaves gleam with white and glittering metal, ‘white and glittering shields and greaves’ could possibly mean that both the shields and greaves worn at Pydna were faced with polished white metal – silver or tin laid over the bronze.

Greaves of Greek type were rarer than other pieces of imported armour, and only three pairs have been found in Thrace. Two pairs of these greaves (from different locations) had been repaired. One pair had been lengthened in the process, and the left one had originally been made for the right leg. This pair had also been fitted with iron chains at the back. Most were held in place by their own elasticity, except for some Hellenistic examples which were strapped. A 4th century pair from Pletena has traces of the tying straps below the knee and above the ankle.

WEAPONS

Swords and knives

The Thracians were famous for their forward-curved swords, but they also used a long sword and the Skythian *akimakes* (see page 38). Swords were most often only secondary weapons, and to begin with only nobles could afford them; the rest of the troops made do with curved daggers. Later, however, swords became more common. From an early date there was a typically Thracian sword known for being longer than other swords. The *Iliad*, Book XIII, says ‘Helenus then struck Deipyrus with a great Thracian sword ...’ An unpublished 4th century Thracian tomb excavated near Shipka in Bulgaria in 1993 contains paintings of two long straight swords that would be good candidates. These longer swords may have inspired Iphicrates to introduce longer swords for his Greek troops.

Despite the apparent similarity to Celtic swords, and the large numbers of long Celtic swords in Bulgarian museums, it is unlikely that the Celtic swords influenced the Thracians. Length or the curved blade may be what distinguished Thracian swords from other early (Greek) swords. The straight Greek *xiphos* was commoner in Thrace during the 5th century and was widespread in soldiers’ graves of the 3rd century. In the Hellenistic period, a straight Macedonian style was also widespread; this had a bone or ivory handle, and the hilt and pommel were cast in one piece with the blade. Swords would probably be worn from a baldric.

There are a few instances of Thracians using swords as their primary weapon instead of just as a sidearm. The Du hill tribesmen are always

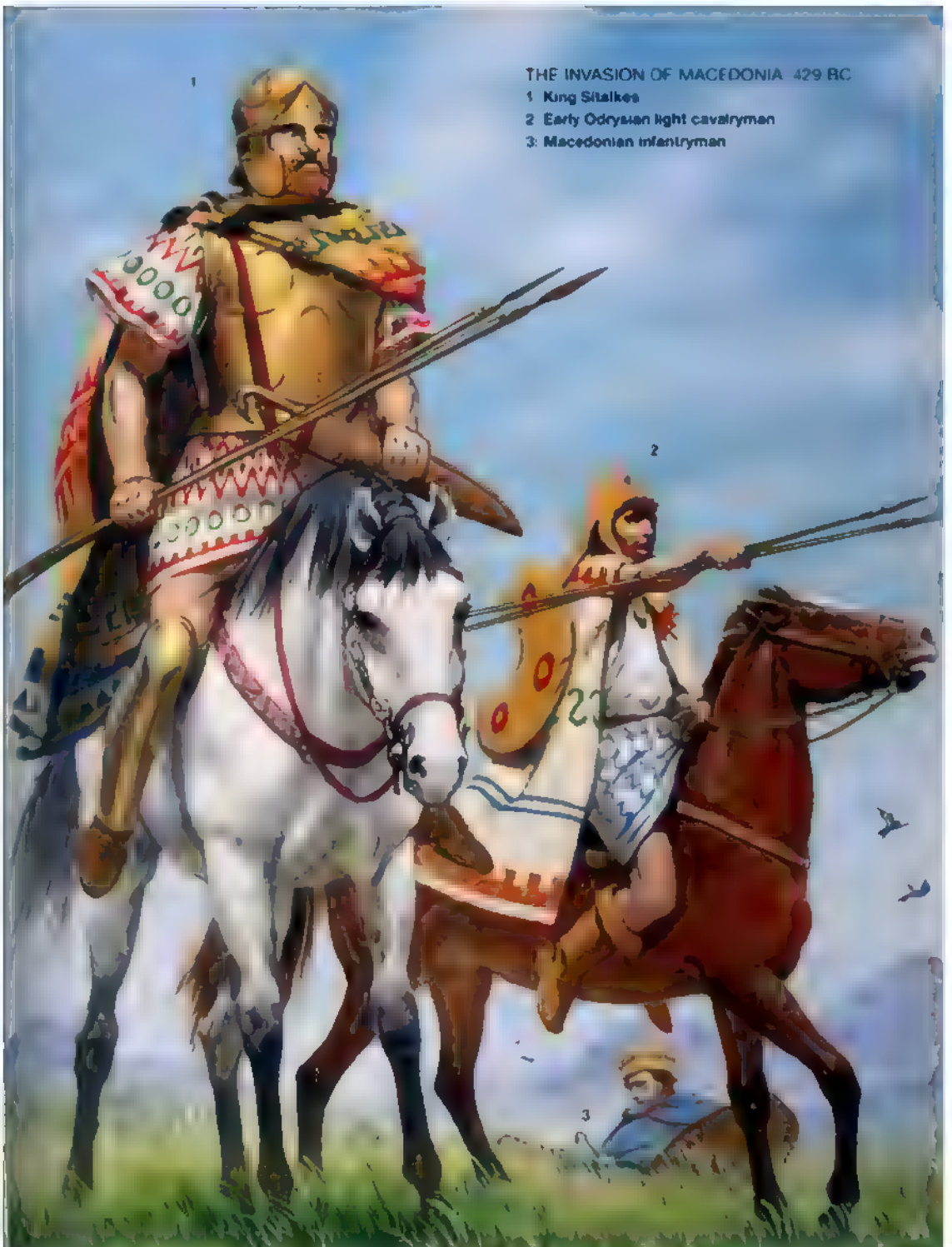
(continued on page 73)

THE INVASION OF MACEDONIA 429 BC

1 King Sitalkes

2 Early Odryian light cavalryman

3: Macedonian infantryman



THE INVASION OF MACEDONIA 429 BC

- 1. Getic nobleman
- 2. Getic horse archer



ATTACK ON A TRIBALLI HILL FORT 424 BC

- 1: Triballi pettast
- 2: Odrysian archer
- 3: De pettast





THYNI NIGHT ATTACK

400 BC

1 & 2 Thyni portasts

3. Thyni youth



THYNI NIGHT ATTACK 400 BC

1 Thracian trumpeter 2 Thracian bodyguard cavalryman

THE KALLINIKOS SKIRMISH

171 BC

1 & 3: Thracian infantrymen

2: Thracian slinger



THE KALLINIKOS SKIRMISH 171 BC

1: King Kotys

2: Thracian bodyguard cavalrman

3: Macedonian cavalrman





THE THRACIAN REVOLT AD 26

- 1. Romano-Thracian bodyguard
- 2. Odrysian light cavalryman
- 3. Odrysian peltesta

referred to by Thucydides as 'swordsmen' or 'armed with swords' (*machairaphoroi*). The only other time that Thracian swordsmen are mentioned is when Croesus hired 'many Thracian swordsmen' (Xenophon, *Cynpædia* 6.2.10) for the Lydian army. Thracian infantry probably continued to use a variety of native sword styles until the Roman conquest. Thracian cavalry, however, are always shown on metalwork and reliefs with long, straight swords from around the 3rd century onwards.

The machaira or kopis

Several styles of curved blades have been found all over Thrace. Similarly, the Kazanluk paintings show a mixture of strange, long, curved swords – perhaps these are what Thucydides calls 'machaira', that being the nearest Greek equivalent. Curved both ways, and unlike any other Greek or Roman sword, some may in fact be *rhomphaia*s.

The sword known to the Greeks as the 'machaira' or 'kopis' was a heavy slashing weapon with the cutting edge on the inside of a long, slightly curved blade. It came into general use in Greece early in the 5th century. A well-preserved example equipped with an ivory hilt was found near Duvault. However, this sword was rare in classical Thrace: only two other pre-Hellenistic examples have been found there. During that time this weapon was reserved for use by nobles, and had considerable prestige value. Ordinary troops used the curved knife instead.

The akinakes

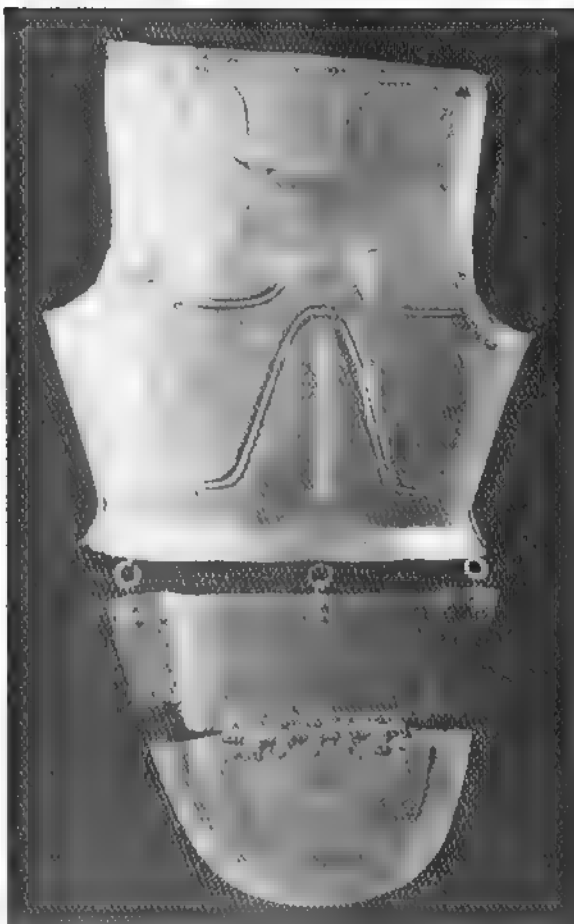
Thracians in Skythian-style clothing are shown wearing the 'akinakes' on Persian reliefs. It is usually longer than its Skythian counterparts. This was originally a Skythian weapon, and was prevalent among the Getai and Triballi in northern Thrace. The most distinctive feature of the akinakes was its scabbard, which had a large side piece or 'ear' for attachment, which allowed the sword to hang at an angle to the belt. It was made of wood covered with leather, and worn on the right side. This design possibly made the sword easier to use on horseback. The handle and pommel were of simple but functional design: 5th century examples had pommels consisting of two narrow strips of iron rising and curling gracefully inwards. This changed in the 4th century, when the pommel became a simple oval counterweight. The grip also changed from a cylindrical to a double-tapered or oval shape that was easier to hold.

The rhomphaia

Plutarch (*Armillus Paulus*) says that at the battle of Pydna, 'the Thracians... brandished as they moved straight and heavily ironed *rumphae* over their right shoulders'. The 'rhomphaia' ('rumpia' in Latin) was a two-handed cutting weapon with a long handle and a long, straight or slightly curved single-edged blade. It was a heavy weapon, being iron for almost all its length, with a wooden or bone grip covering the iron tang of the handle. Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* says that the iron blade was the same length as the wooden haft. Many examples have been found in Thrace (see page 39). One has a blade as long as its handle (about 50cm); another has a 60cm blade and a 50cm handle. Both were made entirely of iron, and are 'straight', with a long triangular-sectioned blade. On other rhomphaia's the blade is straight nearly to the point, where it curves inwards. The blade is very narrow, only 2.5cm wide.



3rd century BC Thracian helmet from the Sashova Mogila tomb, near Kazanluk. (© Daniela Carlsson)



Three-piece bronze cuirass, 450–400 BC, from Rouets, Turgovishte district. The front and back plates are decorated in relief with stylised muscles. The semi-circular abdominal and groin guard is attached by means of silvered nails and hooks to the bottom of the breastplate. This attachment is unique in Thracian finds; indeed, it has rarely been found outside Crete. It is unlikely to have been used except for dismounted action, as the lower plate would have made riding extremely uncomfortable. (Archaeological Museum, Sofia, Inv.No.6158)

THE THRACIAN ARMY

Although by Strabo's time (late 1st century BC) Thrace had been devastated to an exceptional degree, he said that the region as a whole could send into the field 15,000 cavalry and 200,000 infantry (*Geography* 7, f47). This would corroborate Herodotus' statement that there were about a million Thracians, which allows an army 100,000–200,000 strong. No wonder Herodotus (V, 3) says of the Thracians that 'were they under one ruler, or united, they would ... be invincible and the strongest nation on earth.'

The Thracian army was organised along tribal lines, with each contingent commanded by its own prince or his relatives. Since the leaders were expected to fight in the forefront, they would have had little control over their armies once battle was joined. Commands were transmitted by trumpet calls. When mercenary generals were hired, the Thracian king tried to bind the Greek commander directly to him by offering his daughter or a female relative in marriage, and by an exchange of gifts.

Tribes fought together as well as alone, but large agglomerations were rare. More typical were the four tribes that attacked the Romans with 10,000 men in a mountainous defile in 189, or the lone defence by

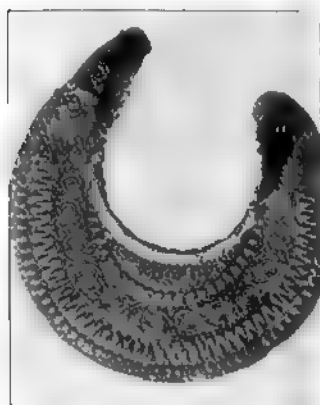
The rhomphaia probably came into use around the late 4th century, the date of the first excavated examples. Thereafter it is recorded in Thracian use by Livy, in the skirmishes before the battle of Cynoscephalae (the Thracians were hindered by the enormous length of their rumpiaie while fighting in a wood); and at the Kallinikos skirmish in 171, when Perseus' Thracians used it to hamstring horses, and returned from battle bearing severed Roman heads as trophies upon their rhomphaia. Aulus Gellius, in his *Attic Nights*, suggests that the Thracian baggage guards at the battle of Magnesia (190) were armed with rhomphaia. It is not known what proportion of Thracian infantry carried them, but roughly half the peltasts in the Kazanluk paintings are armed with rhomphaia-like weapons.

The rhomphaia was greatly feared, as it could cut off a limb with a single blow. At the end of the 1st century AD Roman troops in Dacia were issued with special armour protection for their arms, with greaves, and possibly with specially modified helmets to withstand the terrible effects of the Dacian *falx*, which was similar but had a wholly wooden handle. Valerius Flaccus (VI 94–100) suggests that the Bastarnae carried twin javelins and a white shield as well as a rhomphaia, so the Thracians may have done so too.

the Triballi against Alexander the Great. Tribal fragmentation meant that most Thracian armies would have been 10,000–20,000 strong. The army was not paid, but lived on booty, and the majority of troops would have supplied their own equipment. Consequently, armies dissolved quickly if not successful.

The Thracian army was composed mainly of peltasts and cavalry, the remainder being lighter infantry (javelinmen, archers, and slingers). Greek mercenaries were occasionally hired to make up for the lack of heavy infantry. Unfortunately, when the Macedonians invaded the Thracians had no such infantry capable of defeating the Macedonian phalanx.

It is probable that different Thracian tribes favoured different fighting styles and had different proportions of troop types in their armies. For instance, in the *Iliad*, Euphemes arrayed the Giconians, 'men of the spear', and Pryaechnes led Paeonians, 'armed with the bow'. Unsurprisingly, mountain tribes were more warlike and favoured infantry, while those from the plains favoured cavalry. The Odrysians and the Getai provided the majority of Sitalkes' cavalry. That army as a whole was about one-third cavalry (some 50,000 men). The Odrysai fielded 8,000 horse (28 per cent) and 20,000 foot against Lysimachos. A detachment sent by Seuthes to aid the Spartans in Bithynia in 398 was composed of 200 cavalry (40 per cent) and 300 peltasts. Thucydides also says that the Getai and their neighbours by the Danube were all mounted archers in the Skythian style. However, Alexander faced a Getic army of 4,000 horse and 10,000 foot, or about 28 per cent cavalry. Seuthes hired 2,000 Getic light troops for use against the Athenians in the Thracian Chersonese, which shows that they may have been a regular component of Odrysian armies. So a Thracian royal army might contain between 25 per cent and 40 per cent cavalry, while the army of a single tribe or group of hill tribes might have much less.

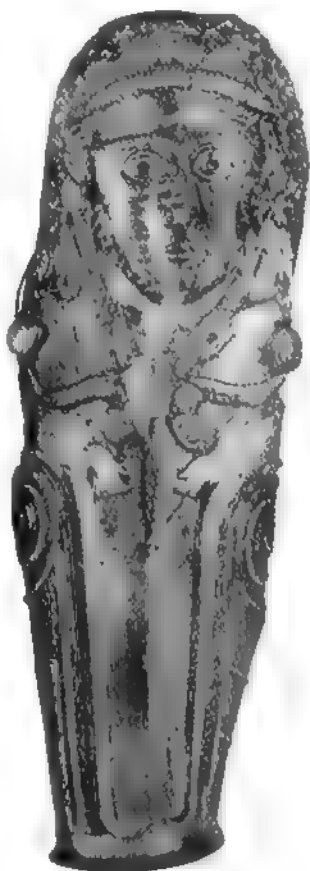


Iron pectoral, 350–300 BC, found with the fittings of a chariot near Mezak, Haskovo district. It is 21cm wide; the surface is silvered and gilded, with traces of fabric on the reverse. The central part has two rows of women's heads, alternating with other bands ornamented with geometrical and plant designs. This was part of an iron cuirass. (Archaeological Museum, Sofia, Inv.No.6401)

Cavalry

The cavalry were chiefly unarmoured javelin-armed skirmishers, with relatively few heavy cavalry forming a bodyguard for the king. Horse-riding epitomised the Thracians. Euripides (*Heracle*) and Homer called the Thracians 'a race of horsemen', and Thrace, 'the land of the Thracian horsemen'. The Odrysians alone could outnumber all the 5th century Greek *poles* and the tribal kingdoms collectively in cavalry forces. They would be mainly armed with the sword (usually the *kopis*) and two cornel-wood javelins, or the composite bow (kept in a leather *gorytus*) if they were Getai. Thracian light cavalry are sometimes shown with a *pelte* shield strapped to their backs – it is assumed that it protected against attacks from the rear, as they are never depicted using them in battle. The cavalry seem only to have used their shields – if they had any – for dismounted action until the 3rd century. (Though a passage in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata*, XVI, states that 'The Thracians first invented what is called the *arph*, a curved sword, and were the first to use shields on horseback.') Before the 3rd century it seems that even the heavy cavalry used the *pelta*, as Greek hoplite shields were rare in Thrace. Parts of only two have been recovered: a bronze rim and palmetto-decorated handgrip were found in a 4th century tomb near Topolovgrad, and a fragment of a similar rim was among grave goods at Svetlen.

The Vratsa grove, 380–350 BC. Markings on the face of the Mother Goddess mask at the knee may represent the tattoos worn by high status Thracian women. The 30-year-old man buried with it had an iron sword, daggers, a quiver of 70 bronze-headed arrows, and a helmet.



Perhaps the best evidence for the success of Thracian cavalry is the way that the mainland Greeks took up Thracian cavalry dress, and horsemanship. Athenian riders wearing Thracian boots and/or headress can be seen on the Parthenon frieze, and wearing Thracian cloaks on Athenian pottery.

Horses were very important to Thracians, and seem to have been of good quality. Studies of Thracian horses from 4th century tombs show that they were larger than steppe ponies and at least comparable to the breeds on the Greek mainland, which reached 1.34m or 13 hands. The biggest would have been between 1.36 and 1.41m, or 14 hands at the withers, similar to stallions of the Przewalski horse. Horses were trained and bred for racing, a prerequisite for successful cavalry warfare. Xenophon's *On Horsemanship*, VIII, rates Thracian horses to be as good as Persian and Greek horses, and says that the Odrysians habitually ran their horseraces downhill. In the *Iliad*, X, a Trojan spy reports that the Thracian king Rhesus has the finest and strongest horses he has ever seen, 'whiter than snow and fleetier than any wind that blows.' Theocritus (*Idyl*, xiv.18) says that the Megarians asked an oracle who were better than they. The extraordinary reply was: 'Better than all other land is the land of Pelasgian Argos, Thracian mares are the best, and the Lacedaemonian women.' Virgil describes three Thracian horses: one had white fetlocks and 'a snowy star' on the forehead; another was a piebald, while a third was dappled with white. Horses in the Kazanluk paintings do not have any markings and are different shades of brown, except for a single white horse. The horse trappings were well crafted and highly decorative, and horses wearing all the items discovered in Thracian tombs must have made a fine sight.

Later cavalry developments

The 4th century saw the start of many changes in cavalry dress and equipment. The distinctive Thracian dress was discarded, additional armour of new types was worn, shields and saddles came into use, and light infantry were trained to support cavalry. Thracian cavalry appear to have followed the Greeks in adopting shields around 275. Light cavalry was now likely to have the basic protection of helmet and shield, while heavy cavalry took to wearing iron helmets and composite corselets. Cavalry shields could be round with a central boss, oval like the *thureos*, or very large and circular with a spine boss.

The kopis was mostly replaced in cavalry service by a long sword near the end of the 4th century, but Thracian cavalry of the late Hellenistic period also used the *sica*, a large curved sword. This seems to be the Roman name for any curved sword or knife, as it was also used for the sword of the Thracian style of gladiator, and for Celtic knives; so the cavalry *sica* was probably like the kopis or the traditional Thracian curved swords. In 130 a Thracian cavalryman fighting for a Pergamene pretender cut off the head of the Roman consul Crassus with a single blow from his *sica*. In 163 at the battle of Marissa, a Thracian cavalryman (probably using a *sica*) chopped an arm off a Jewish rebel, also with a single blow.

The southern Thracians learned of the simple Skythian saddle through their northern cousins. One of the horses from the Kazanluk paintings has a low dark brown saddle on a cream and brown cloth.

Many brightly coloured saddledcloths are shown on the Kazanluk paintings. One is red with yellow decoration, except that the tassels on the rear points are white. Others are straight-edged and plain red. Animal-skin saddle cloths were also used.

Early 2nd century Thracian noble cavalry had a force of light infantry attached to them. These may have been trained to fight alongside the cavalry and to hamstring the enemy horses. Bithynian cavalry, too, seem to have been closely supported by attached infantry. This is not recorded before the early 3rd century, and is probably a result of Hellenistic influence, as Greek and Macedonian generals were using light infantry in close support of their cavalry long before.

Infantry:

Slingers

Thracian light troops probably threw stones whenever possible, but Thracian slingers are first recorded in the 4th century. Slingers would have been herdsmen or shepherds from mountainous or upland regions, very poor but agile men. Youths unable to carry the weight of other heavier weapons and armour might also be given this job. They are rarely mentioned in ancient sources, and were an unusual component of Thracian armies. They are last mentioned in 49, when Appian says that Pompey recruited Thracian slingers for his army (*Civil Wars*, II, VIII, 49).

The Thracian slinger's equipment would have been limited by their status and income to the absolute minimum – a tunic that may not have covered their body, and a sling. They would have thrown either lead or stone projectiles, depending upon availability. Slings were apparently a popular weapon during Thracian sieges. Nearly 200 sling missiles have been discovered inside and in front of Hellenistic Thracian sanctuaries, settlements and strongholds. No fewer than 104 sling bullets have been found at a single site near Pernik, possibly in Agrianian territory.

Archers

Archers were more common in Thracian armies than slingers, but were still only a small proportion of the light infantry, and more likely to be found in armies of the northern tribes. Thracian archers were mixed with Cretan archers at the battle of Pydna, suggesting that the Thracian archers were as good as the Cretans. They are portrayed in Thracian art only in hunt scenes, other images come from Greek pottery. Nearly all depictions of Thracian bows show them to be the recurved composite Skythian type. Material from Getic sites shows that bows were a royal symbol, though whether this can be extended to all Thracians is not so certain. Bows were not popular among the other Thracians, as their use is mainly portrayed during royal hunts; they are rarely mentioned in texts, and arrowheads are found in only a few tombs.

Javelinmen

Euripides' *Rhesos* and other sources refer to light infantry (*gymnetes*) or javelinmen who are distinct from peltasts. The javelinmen may have lacked shields, carried curved knives instead of swords, and carried a larger bundle of smaller, shorter javelins than the peltasts, but otherwise had the same boots, hat, and tunic. Certain tribes, like the Agrianians, specialised in javelinmen, but normally this troop type would form up to



The Agighiol greave; another superb 4th century BC northern Thracian piece, this too has a silvered surface ornamented with gilded details.



Sword and knife blades found in Thrace (not to scale).

Top left: Three *machaira* blades from the Vratsa region; only one is of the classic shape, suggesting that there were many Thracian variants. **Top centre:** A *xiphos*. **Top right:** The single-edged curved knife was a popular weapon – these six examples were found near Vratsa. The other knife common in Thrace was T-shaped.

Bottom left: Four Celtic swords from Vratsa. **Bottom centre left:** 3rd century BC iron, bronze and gilt *skinakes*, found with parts of the sheath; the quillon ends are stylised rams' heads. **Bottom centre right:** A *machaira* from Pleven. **Bottom right:** Two knives, one above the other, from Vratsa; a restored *kopis* from Douvanil, found in fragments with ivory decoration on the hilt; and three *skinakes* from Vratsa. (© Daniella Carlsson 2001)

30 per cent of a Thracian army. Later javelinmen may have carried wicker shields, such as the *gertha* among the Roman trophies after Pydna.

Peltasts

The main traditional infantry type was the peltast armed, like the Bithynians in Xerxes' army, with javelins and daggers. Some used a thrusting spear or a sword instead. They had little or no armour, and their only protection was their eponymous small shield, which was usually crescent-shaped but might also be circular or oval. This was called the *pelte* (plural *pellai*) in Greek, or *pelta* (plural *pellae*) in Latin.

Greek pottery provides our only visual record of *pellai*. Some sources mention bronze and even gold as materials used in their construction. However, for the most part these small shields lacked a rim or any kind of bronze facing, and were made of perishable materials (generally a wood or wicker frame covered with goat- or sheepskin). Traces of such a shield made of some organic material, fixed with bronze nails, have been found in a tumulus near Debnovo in the Lovech district. Round shields are shown on a relief at Persepolis and on a Bithynian coin. The Persepolis shield is very convex in section, and

apparently made of uncovered wicker. The Bithynian coin, of Nikomedes I (279–255), shows a large round shield, slightly smaller than an *aspis*, carried by the goddess Bendis together with two javelins and a straight sword with scabbard and baldric. The shield is either decorated with circles of rivets, or perhaps has an embossed metal facing.

The *pelte* was usually carried with an arm strap and a leather or cord handle at the rim, or slung on the back using a back strap. Although the arm strap is sometimes shown as indistinguishable from the bronze *porpax* of the hoplite shield, this could be a heroic artistic convention on the part of Greek vase painters. The single central grip would then have been more common. Xenophon describes a Thracian whose slung *pelte* caught between the stakes of a fence he was trying to clamber over. The use of the *pelte* and the peltast's lack of armour enabled him to evade the charge of heavily equipped troops and yet hold an advantage over lighter troops, such as archers, in hand-to-hand fighting. Another advantage was that peltasts were far cheaper to equip and maintain than hoplites.

Peltasts are always illustrated with only two javelins, but it is clear from battle accounts that more were carried, the number depending on their length (between 1.1m and 2m). There are references in Greek texts to 'Thracian spears' (e.g. Euripides, *Herakles* 1155), but these are unfortunately not further described. Most warrior burials contained multiple spearheads with blades of varying lengths. The principal forms were derived from older Iron Age types, though the total length is often equal to or smaller than the blades of their early predecessors. Sixth century and later examples tend to be much shorter and narrower. Javelin

heads tended to be smaller, thinner, and longer than other spearheads, though often there is no difference. Some javelin heads were obviously designed specifically for throwing rather than for hand-to-hand use.

Until the 3rd century some Thracian peltasts were armed with a single 3m-long ash spear instead of the javelin. Thracians seem to have used both types of spear in either mixed or separate units. It is hard to see how these could have fulfilled the traditional peltast skirmishing role, but there is no evidence that these spearmen carried javelins as well. Greek art always shows Thracian peltasts with either a long spear or two javelins, but never both.

Perhaps the troops with long spears were meant to support the javelin-armed men while the latter skirmished. When the javelins ran out, the spearmen could advance to hand-to-hand combat. The Thracians may have mixed spearmen in groups of javelin-armed peltasts; certainly there are no references to separate bodies of spearmen. Such a mixed group would be able to present a front-rank hedge of spearpoints when required, as a rallying point for the javelinmen or to hold off cavalry while the javelinmen lobbed missiles from behind. Another possibility is that weapon use was divided along geographic and tribal lines: perhaps a few tribes preferred the long spear, one tribe the sword, while the rest used the javelin. The archaeological evidence suggests that individual soldiers used spears of different types according to circumstances, like the pre-Achaic Greek soldier. Thracian troops continued to use outmoded Greek armour long after the Greeks had dispensed with it, as well as having beliefs and practices in common with the Archaic Greeks, so they may have continued to arm themselves in the same old fashion, too.

The controversial Iphicratean reforms may have included armament with both types of spear. The sword and spear were also lengthened (to 1.5–2 times as long), the shield lightened, and special boots worn. Iphicrates may have got these ideas from the Thracians, as some Thracian tribes were using especially long spears and long swords in the 4th century. They could also have influenced Philip II in his development of the *sarissa* pike. Philip was wounded through his right thigh by a Triballian 'sarissa', killing his horse and maiming him. At a later date, a Median horseman was pierced by a Thracian peltast's 'sarissa', after the long shaft had already passed through the belly of the horse (Lucian, *Aekrikoí Dialogoi*, 27.3). The peltast had crouched down, grounded his spear, and parried the Median's lance with his pelte. It is not known exactly when Thracians stopped using long spears. They are last reported in Thracian use (by Plutarch) in 322 BC, when a Macedonian general sent spearmen to arrest the Athenian orator Demosthenes.

The Iphicratean reforms, if they took place, would have resulted in a tougher Greek peltast, or a hoplite better able to deal with peltasts, both of which would have required a Thracian response. Another factor

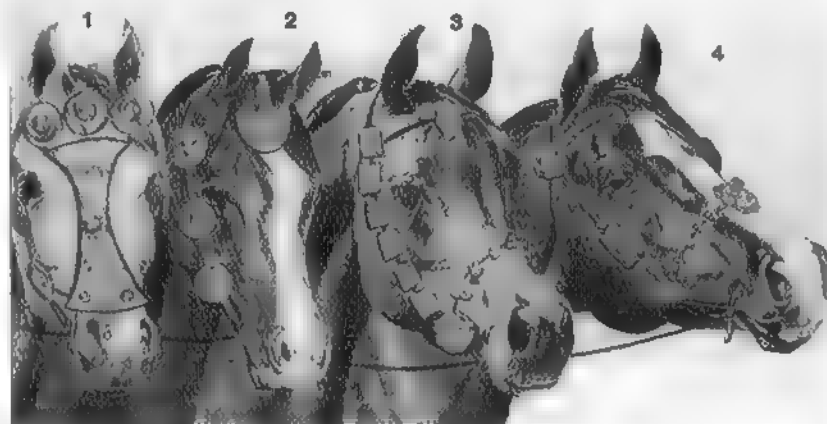


The *rhomphala*: nine 4th-1st century BC Iron examples, points uppermost, from the region south of Plovdiv inhabited by the Bessi. The blades are single-edged and decorated with two longitudinal grooves. Most are straight, only the left hand two still showing slight curvature; and note the common ring feature, perhaps for a carrying strap or cord. (© Daniela Carlssohn 2001)



A north Thracian horseman depicted on the side of the Agighiol helmet – see page 15. His scale corselet appears to have pteryges at the thigh.

Reconstruction of silver-gilt harness ornaments. (1) 4th century BC, from Simeonovgrad, near Haskovo. (2) 3rd or 2nd century BC, from Ravnogor, near Pazardzjik – found with a hair from the forelock in the hollow 'horn'. (3) c.400–350 BC, from Letnitsa. (4) 4th century BC, from the Lukovit treasure. (© Linda Dicmanis 2001)



would have been the peltasts' changing role on the battlefield, where they were increasingly used to dominate difficult terrain, or to form the link between cavalry and phalanx. Previously, peltasts had attacked the heavy infantry centre of a Greek army by skirmishing with them. Peltasts were usually placed on the flanks of an army, where they would fight other peltasts. As a result, Thracian infantry equipment became heavier – they wore metal helmets and greaves. Thracian peltasts in a Macedonian army formed a flank guard for the phalanx, and a link between the cavalry and the phalanx, or operated as an advance guard. This deployment is described at the battle of Pydna, when Plutarch (*Arminius Paulus*, 18) says 'First marched the Thracians ... Next the Greek mercenaries ... Third ... the agema'.

Later Thracian peltasts are shown using oval shields, and may have given up the pelta for a larger oval wicker shield, or the much heavier *thureos*. The *thureos* could be oval or rectangular in shape, covered in leather and painted. The *thureos* may have been borrowed from the Illyrians, who had been carrying similar shields since at least the 7th century. The Kazanluk friezes, which predate the Celtic invasions in 279, show several examples of long, flat oval shields being used by Thracian warriors. One of these has the distinctive rib of the *thureos* but the others do not, and it is possible that they may represent a flat ribless shield. A large, flat, egg-shaped 4th century shield found near Kynstendil was faced with bronze, which glitters even today; this may have been the type of shield carried by the Kazanluk men. Alternatively the Kazanluk shields might have been wicker, as they are painted as rimless, wicker-coloured and flat. They have three loops hanging down on the inside, used for a single hand grip, or perhaps for slinging on the back.

A c.2nd century stela from Phrygia shows two more likely possibilities. It displays two men who have been killed by the Bithynian Menas. One has a conventional ribbed oval *thureos*, the other a ribbed rectangular *thureos*. One of these two men, but we do not know which, is a Thracian. Another grave stone from Bithynia also shows Bithynian infantry with the oval *thureos*, so the oval shield is more likely. Menas' stela is close in date to the battle of Pydna (168), so perhaps the Thracian infantry at Pydna carried one of these types of shield.

THRACIAN TACTICS

The Thracians were exceptionally mobile, and able to rely on heavy showers of javelins and some archery. At the battle of the Hydaspes, Curtius (VIII, 14, 24–30) says that 'Alexander sent the Agrianes and Thracian light-armed against the elephants, for they were better at skirmishing than fighting at

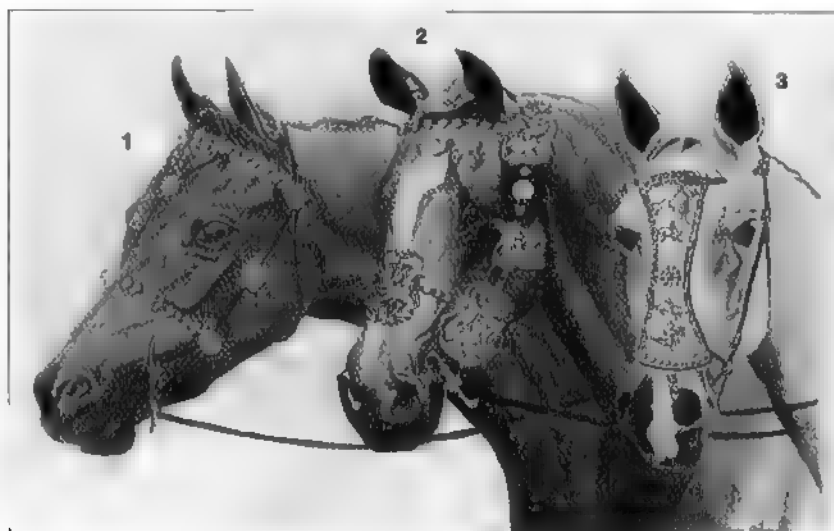
close quarters. These released a thick barrage of missiles on both elephants and drivers . . . Hence their preferred tactic was skirmishing, to which their wooded and hilly terrain was well suited. These tactics were often successful, mainly when their opponents lacked light troops, were outnumbered, or were caught in suitable terrain. The Thracians favoured ambushes, like that on the Roman column after Magnesia, or night attacks under cover of darkness, like that on Mardonius' Persians.

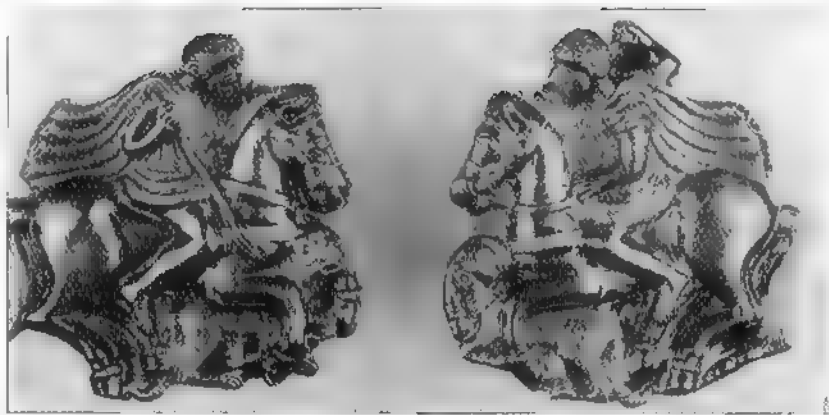
The Thracians invented the peltast style of fighting, which the Greeks initially had difficulty in countering, especially in difficult terrain. For example, in *Anabasis* 3.3, the Bithynians set upon some Arcadians of the Ten Thousand and kill them all. 'For some time, the Greeks marched and fought back at the same time, but at a place where they had to cross a watercourse the Thracians routed them and killed the whole force.' The Thracians followed up this success with an attack on the hill where the Greeks were encamped, and were able to repeat their victory since the Greeks did not have any missile troops. When the Greeks charged the Thracians easily evaded them, and shot at them from the flanks. Spartan hoplites suffered the same fate at Sphacteria in 425, and Lechaeum in 390 (though few, if any, Thracians were present at Lechaeum).

To counter these tactics the Greeks created their own peltasts, and developed special hoplite tactics. Consequently, Greek states hired fewer Thracian mercenaries from the 4th century onwards. The Thracians then had to face more balanced armies. These had sufficient light troops to protect their flanks and prevent Thracian javelinmen from worrying their heavy cavalry and infantry. Macedonian heavy cavalry operated against them with impunity when Siialkes invaded Macedonia. This happened again during the Lyginus battle between Alexander and the Triballi. Against Theban and Persian cavalry they enjoyed more success. Using skirmishing tactics, some Dii beat off Theban cavalry after the sack of Mycalessus (though not without loss). At the battle of Cunaxa the largely Thracian peltasts fought with some distinction, skilfully allowing charging Persian cavalry to pass through their opened ranks while showering them with javelins. The Persians opted to ride on to the enemy camp rather than face the peltasts again.

Little is known about Thracian formations and deployment. The cavalry formed into a wedge, which made a charge more effective. The Thracians learnt this formation from the Skythians, and the Macedonians learnt it from the Thracians. In one battle, the Triballi drew up their forces in four ranks. In the first rank were placed the weaker men, and behind them the stronger men. The cavalry formed the third rank; but the rear rank was of women, who, if

Reconstruction of harness ornaments. (1) Gold ornaments from the Kravevo treasure, Targoviste region, c.300 BC – probably Getic. (2) 4th century BC silver ornaments from the Lukovit treasure. (3) Silver headstall from Mramor Mogila, Panagyurishte district, 350–300 BC. (© Linda Dicmanis 2001)





Late 4th century BC silver-gilt
Triballi or Getic horse
decorations from Lukovit.

Reconstruction of a Classical
Thracian light javelinman.
(© Daniella Carlsson 2001)



the men wavered, rallied them with cries and taunts.

Night attacks were a favourite Thracian tactic. It seems to have been a Thracian custom to march to battle drunk, as well! 'Clearchus ... encamped near the mountains of Thrace. When the Thracians gathered he knew that, drunk and rushing from the mountains, they would attack at night' (*Stratagems*

2.2.6). Polyænus mentions many stratagems employed by generals such as Iphicrates and Clearchus to defeat Thracian night attacks. One of these included the Thracian practice of banging their weapons together even when engaged in a night attack. Xenophon also says that Seuthes regarded night marches as commonplace. However, he also relates that even a small force of Thracians that marched at night would often become disorganised – the cavalry would get separated from the infantry.

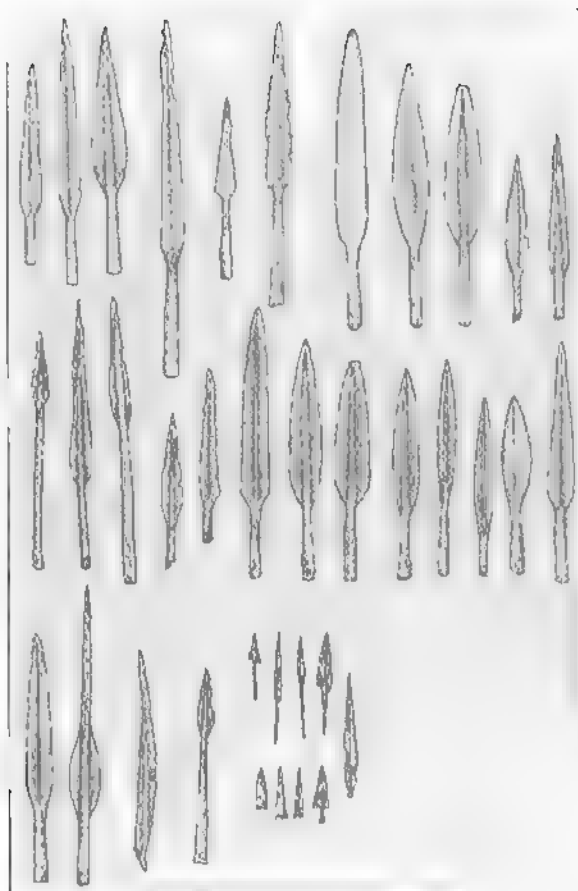
The Roman client-king of Thrace, Rhoeimetaces, accustomed the Thracians to the use of Roman weapons, military standards, and discipline. Assuming that his infantry were trained as Roman-style auxiliaries rather than legionaries, they may have practiced a more disciplined version of the same basic tactics. Only a proportion would have received such training – the rest would have remained untamed savages. An account of Thracian auxiliaries destroying a Gallic force on a mountaintop shows that they retained their effectiveness while in Roman service.

Fortifications

When all else failed, the Thracians would leave their villages on the plains and hole up in their hill forts. The Thyni did this when attacked by Seuthes, as did the Odrysai, Bessi, and Dentheleti when attacked by Philip V in Philippopolis (Plovdiv). He took the town without a blow, as the inhabitants fled to safety in the three steep hills above (one of which is topped by the Thracian fortress of Eumolpia).

Although the Thracians only built one fortified town or city (Seuthopolis), they had numerous hill forts throughout the area. These were not lived in, but used as places of refuge. A Roman attack on such a fort is described in Tacitus (*Annals* IV, XLVI–LJ): 'Besides their natural ferocity ... [the Thracians] pointed to fortresses amid rocks where they had conveyed their parents and their wives'. For the Romans to invest it, this fortress required lines of circumvallation four miles long.

Some locations are rich in megalithic monuments and many have been in use since early in the first millennium. Several were in continuous use until the end of the Byzantine era. There are hilltop sites over 1,000m above sea level, but others can be much lower down, though still chosen for their strategic location on spurs overlooking the Central Plain. Forts in Greek Thrace are situated at between 600m and 1,000m above sea level; all have good sources of water close by and are prime strategic



Spear- and arrowheads from Vratsa, Pleven, and other sites in Bulgaria. Three principal javelin head shapes were in use between the 5th and 3rd centuries BC. The straight-sided type had a pronounced midrib, the blade base jutting sharply away from the socket; this was the commonest form used by the Getai. With the leaf-shaped type, the blade base curved smoothly into the socket. The third type was the barbed Skythian style. The number and range of types increased in the later 4th and during the 3rd century.
(© Daniela Carlsson 2001)

locations, with excellent views of the surrounding countryside, in some cases even as far as the coast itself in clear weather. Although Mycenaean ('Cyclopean') stonework can be seen at a few sites, most were not fortified with stone before the Hellenistic period, when they acquired towers, stairways, and double-faced walls. Initially of dry stone construction, these were later replaced with mortared stonework. They frequently dominate and control a major route, and usually have circuit walls on the most vulnerable side, facing a valley or nearby village.

Temporary fortifications were also built. Xenophon (*Hellenica* III, 2.1–4) describes how Odrysian Thracians fighting in Bithynia built a fortified camp, with a stockade that was 'only about the height of a man'. The way this event is described shows that Xenophon did not think there was anything unusual about this behaviour; however, since this is the only known description of Thracians building a fortified camp, it is unclear if this was general practice. Alexander surprised the Triballi when they were occupied in pitching camp, but Arrian does not say if it was fortified or not. Xenophon also says that each house in a Thyni village was surrounded by a high, strong wooden palisade (*Anabasis* 7.4.15).

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THE PLATES

A: THE INVASION OF MACEDONIA, 429 BC

A1: King Sitalkes

The Thracian king is based on archaeological evidence and wears a bronze bell cuirass, bronze Chalkidian helmet, bronze greaves, and a Thracian cloak. He carries two javelins and a kopis. His breast plate is decorated with dragons heads, and his helmet with a griffin and palmettes. The helmet comes from an unknown site in Bulgaria and is dated to the second half of the 5th century. The silver harness ornaments come from Binoia tumulus in Bulgaria.

A2: Early Odrysian light cavalryman

This horseman is based on a painting on a 5th century *pelike* from Apollonia. He carries two javelins, and a *pelta* is slung on his back. Greek vase paintings show Thracian light cavalry dressed the same as the peltasts: in patterned tunic, foxskin cap, fawnskin boots and long cloak. Other less sophisticated examples of Greek pottery show Thracian cavalry dressed very simply in a pointed hat and long flowing tunic, and they are indistinguishable from Skythian cavalry. Some 4th century Thracian metalwork shows the cavalryman bareheaded and with bare feet, a medium length flowing cloak and simple tunic.

A3: Macedonian infantryman

The stricken Macedonian infantryman comes from the early 3rd century Kazanluk tomb paintings. He is thought to be Macedonian because of his location on the frieze, and his peculiar hat resembling the *kausia* of the Macedonian warrior nobility, but he may be Thracian, because the Macedonians

did not use oval shields, and because of his similarity to the Thracian warriors on the same painting. He wears a blue cloak and carries a kopis and two javelins. His shield is oval with the top and bottom cut square like the later Celtic *thuraios*. A 5th century Macedonian infantryman would be carrying a circular wicker shield, animal skin cloak, and wearing sandals (or going barefoot) instead of shoes.

B: THE INVASION OF MACEDONIA, 429 BC

B1: Getic nobleman

Getic reinforcements crossing the Danube plain southwards to join Sitalkes. The noble chieftain is based on a horse applique from northern Thrace. He wears a Skythian-style bronze scale armour corselet and leggings, but could wear greaves instead. His slung helmet is based on several silver gilt examples found in Romania. He is shown bareheaded and with his hair arranged in a top knot; it is possible that the hair was dyed blue.

B2: Getic horse archer

The horse archer is based on a Persian relief of a Skudrian tributary from Persepolis tomb 1. Virgil (*Aeneid*, 5.409) suggests that Thracian arrows were considered the best of their kind. Getic sites have produced numerous small bronze three-edged arrowheads with barbed or straight ends, of the same style as Skythian arrowheads. Small bronze socketed arrowheads with three barbs, found at Olynthos and elsewhere, may be Thracian. In Rozovets and in three other tombs in central Thrace up to 500 bronze arrowheads were found, some still attached to wooden shafts.

C: ATTACK ON A TRIBALLI HILL FORT, 424 BC

C1: Triballi peltast

In 424 Sitalkes attacked the Triballi and died fighting them. Thracians retreated to their hill forts when attacked. Tacitus (*Annals*, XLVII) later described the bolder warriors singing and dancing in front of their ramparts. Here a Triballi peltast armed with a long spear wears an unusual dappled cow hide outfit that only partially covers his body; this is taken from an example of Greek illustrated pottery.

C2: Odrysian archer

The costumes on this plate are partially based on a scene on a 6th century Attic amphora showing peltasts, an archer, and a cavalryman in combat. This figure is also based on a 4th century silver belt plaque from north-western Thrace showing an archer with beard, plain conical cap, composite bow, and pattern-edged tunic. He would also have a quiver hanging from the waist belt, and possibly a dagger. The quiver would have held around 100 arrows, and would probably have been made from leather. The decomposed remains of quivers made of some organic material, probably leather, have been found at a tomb near Vratsa.

C3: Dii peltast

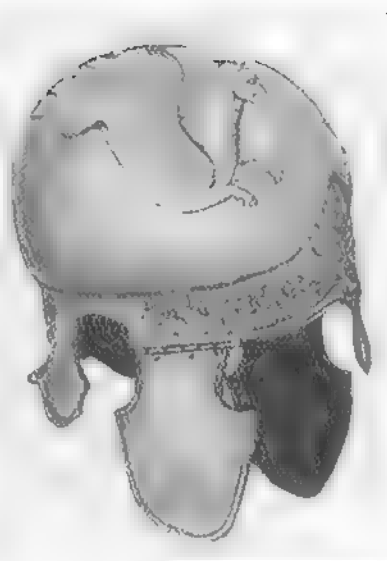
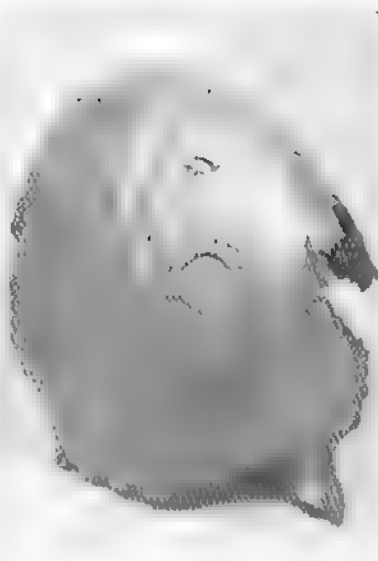
This warrior is armed with a *machaira*. Many types of curved swords have been found in Thrace, and this example is based on a weapon now on display in a Bulgarian museum. He also carries a circular *pelte* – as discussed in the text, not all *peltae* were crescent-shaped.



Late 4th century BC 'egg-shaped' shield found in the Dolna Koznitsa mound near Kyustendil. It has a thin, fragmented bronze facing. (Author's photograph)

RIGHT Bronze helmet from an unknown site in Bulgaria, 450–400 BC. It is decorated with griffons on both sides of the crown, and palmettes on the eyebrows. It is badly damaged and the cheek-guards are missing. (Sofia Archaeological Museum, Inv.No.4013)

FAR RIGHT Reconstruction of the griffion helmet. (© Daniela Carlsson 2001)



D: THYNI NIGHT ATTACK, 400 BC

In winter 400, Xenophon visited Seuthes II in his *tyrsis* (fortified palace). The Greek officers were invited to a drunken feast, during which Seuthes was presented with a white horse by a Thracian. The Greeks agreed to help the king in a short-term operation in south-eastern Thrace against the Thyni and other Thracians who had broken away from his authority. Xenophon praised the Thyni, saying that they took the Odrysian king Teres' baggage train despite the latter's large army, and that they were supposed to be the most dangerous of all the tribes, especially in night fighting. They were also fond of attacking and wrecking shipping that passed their shores.

The plan was to take the Thyni by surprise by marching at night (Seuthes had been on many night marches) and falling on them the next day. To keep the army together, the hoplites marched at the front of the column and Seuthes' armoured cavalry and peltasts at the rear. When day came the cavalry and peltasts moved to the front; by midday they had crossed the mountains, and were then unleashed upon the villages. The attack was a great success, but Seuthes' men scattered in pursuit, so Xenophon and the younger Greeks seized the heights while the older troops occupied the villages. Having gathered a large amount of booty, they then pitched camp.

A large number of Thyni had abandoned their homes and fled to the mountains, so Seuthes burned down some of the villages, and threatened to do the same to the rest and their corn if they did not come back. The women, children, and older men did come down, but the younger men bivouacked in the villages under the mountain. During the night Seuthes ordered the youngest of the hoplites to move off and make a dawn attack on these villages. Most of the villagers escaped, but the rest Seuthes shot down. Seuthes then encamped on the plain while the Greeks took quarters in the uppermost village below the summit. After a few days the Thyni sent hostages and opened negotiations, but in reality they were spying out the enemy dispositions. The Greeks were so cold that they suffered frostbite, and envied the Thracians' traditional clothing.

The Thyni attacked the following night. They threw javelins into the houses, set them on fire, knocked off the heads of the out-thrust Greek spears with clubs, and taunted Xenophon to come out and be killed.

D1 is the archetypal Thracian peltast, armed with two javelins and a knife or sword. He is based on a vase in the Ashmolean Museum. His cloak reaches to the ground, and his shield is decorated with good luck symbols.

D2's club is shown on one of the Alexandrovo tomb paintings, which feature hunting scenes, but may have been used only for killing rabbits. In that case he would have used a simple knobbed stick instead. His cloak and shield come from a plate in the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard.

D3 is described by Xenophon as a 'beautiful youth with a shield' who was about to be killed but had his life saved by one of Xenophon's amorous officers. His picture is based on an Attic vase showing a similar semi-naked peltast, who is armed with a bundle of short javelins.

When, at a trumpet signal, the Greeks leapt out with swords drawn, the Thracians ran away. The Greeks suffered only a few casualties when some of the Thyni turned about and hurled javelins at men who were running past a burning house.

E: THYNI NIGHT ATTACK, 400 BC

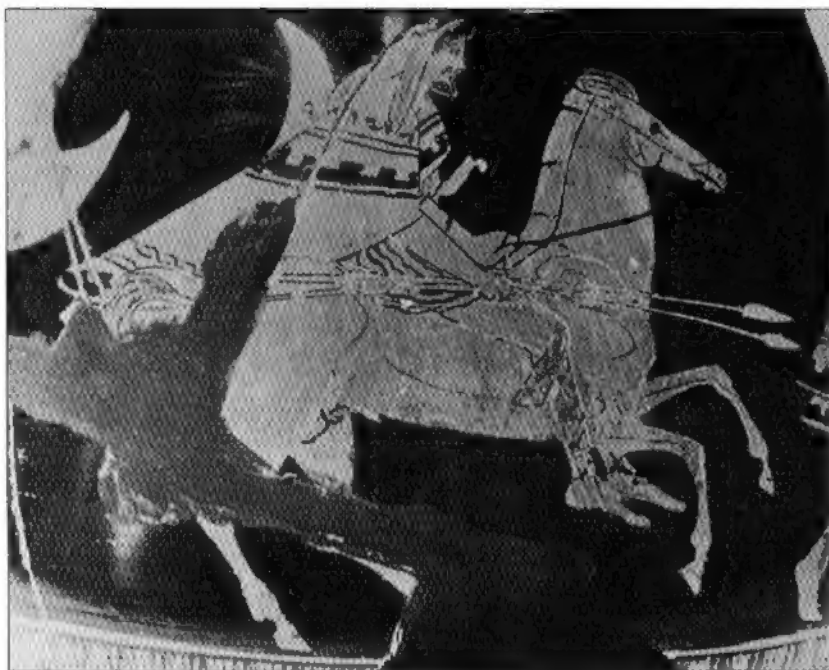
At this point, Seuthes arrived with seven bodyguard cavalymen and his Thracian trumpeter – the latter had helped scare off the Thyni by the continual sounding of his horn. The garments, horse trappings, and other equipment illustrated here are based on those shown on a horseman in the Alexandrovo tomb.

E1: Thracian trumpeter

The trumpeter is shown in the Kazanluk paintings. He has a composite corselet and an early type of Chalkidian helmet, without hinges. He wears a gold pectoral on his chest as a sign of rank.

E2: Thracian bodyguard cavalryman

The helmet is a 4th century horned bronze-iron example found near Bourgas. The later style of 'bell' cuirass has larger armholes, a low collar, and a silver-covered iron pectoral around the neck, this latter was a distinctive Thracian feature.



Traditional Thracian light cavalryman with a crescent-shaped shield slung on his back, from a 5th century BC red figure pelike found near Sozopol.

BELOW Detail from a 2nd century BC silver bowl from north-western Bulgaria: a Thracian wearing multiple torcs around his neck.

Seuthes agreed to help Xenophon attack the Thyni on the mountain the next day, but when the Thyni saw the masses of hoplites, peltasts and horsemen moving to attack them they offered to surrender. Seuthes now had a force three times as large as before, for the Odrysians wanted a part in Seuthes' success. Unfortunately Seuthes had obtained Xenophon's services almost as a king without a kingdom, and he was unable to pay anything like the agreed wages.

F: THE KALLINIKOS SKIRMISH, 171 BC

Livy says that the victorious Thracian troops returned to their camp swaggering, singing and dancing, with severed Roman heads on their *rhomphaia*s as trophies.

F1: Thracian infantryman

He has the late 4th century shield, Chalkidian helmet, and greaves found in the Dolna Koznitsa mound near Kyustendil, together with a *rhomphaia* and the black tunic described by Plutarch. The Thracians at Pydna may have looked like this, as they are described with 'glittering' shields and black tunics. Alternatively, this bronze-faced shield may be a parade piece – instead he might carry an ordinary white *thureos*.

F2: Thracian slinger

There are only rare mentions and no known depictions of Thracian slingers, and this reconstruction is based on an auxiliary slinger from Trajan's Column.

F3: Thracian infantryman

This figure is shown in the clothes worn by a hunter in the Alexandrovo tomb paintings, and armour and equipment found together in the Blagoevgrads region of Bulgaria: bronze Thracian helmet, bronze greaves, three bronze torques, and an iron *rhomphaia*. They are dated to around the end of the 4th century. He carries an oval *thureos* like those shown in the Kazanluk tomb paintings. The *rhomphaia* had a large ring in the centre, which could have been used for a carrying strap.



An unusual Thracian tactic was the use of wagons as a defensive obstacle or as a terror weapon. Arrian (1.1.6) describes how 'a large force of natives under arms and the free Thracians' defended a pass in the lower slopes of the Haemus mountains against Alexander. 'They had collected large numbers of carts, which they intended to use, if they were hard-pressed, as a sort of defensive palisade, with the further idea of sending them crashing down upon the Macedonian phalanx as the men were climbing the steepest part of the slope.' The wagons were loaded with rocks to make them more effective.

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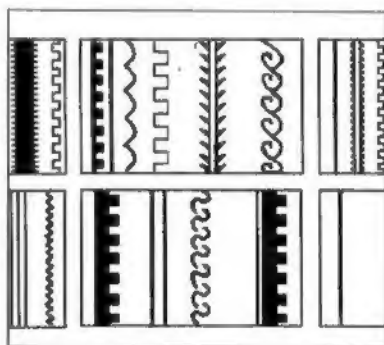
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